

The Nay Science

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A History of German Indology



Vishwa Adluri
and
Joydeep Bagchee

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To all mothers

*Once upon a time I studied theology . . . with the greatest interest,
and then found I did not have the faith required for the pulpit, and
thereupon transferred over to history*

Jacob Burckhardt, "Letter to Friedrich von Preen, 7 July 1878."

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PROLOGUE

The story of philology does not begin in Germany. Its prelude appears in a violent encounter between a god and a maiden, in a story recounted by Plato. The Greek legend concerns the story of Orithuia, the daughter of the Athenian king Erechtheus. While playing on the banks of the river Ilissus with her friends, she is abducted by Boreas, or the North Wind. Socrates and Phaedrus, out for a walk outside the city walls, approach the river. Here is how the conversation between them unfolds:

PHAEDRUS: Tell me, Socrates, isn't it from somewhere near this stretch of the Ilissus that people say Boreas carried Orithuia away?

SOCRATES: So they say.

PHAEDRUS: Couldn't this be the very spot? The stream is lovely, pure and clear, just right for girls to be playing nearby.

SOCRATES: No, its two or three hundred yards farther downstream, where one crosses to get to the district of Agra. I think there is even an altar to Boreas there.

PHAEDRUS: I hadn't noticed it. But tell me, Socrates, in the name of Zeus, do you really believe that that legend is true? (*Phaedrus* 229a–c; Nehamas and Woodruff trans.)

Since philology as the study of ancient accounts, mostly written, hangs on this question, let us pay special attention to Socrates' response.

SOCRATES: Actually, it would not be out of place for me to reject it, as our intellectuals do. I could then tell a clever story: I could claim that a gust of North Wind blew her over the rocks where she was playing with Pharmaceia; and once she was killed that way people said she had been carried off by Boreas—or was it, perhaps, from Areopagus? The story is also told that she was carried away from there instead. Now, Phaedrus, such explanations are amusing enough, but they are a job for a man I cannot envy at all. He'd have to be far too ingenious, and work too hard—mainly because after that he will have to go on and give a rational account of the form of Hippocentaurs, and then of the Chimera; and a whole flood of Gorgons and Pegasuses and other monsters, in large numbers and absurd forms, will overwhelm him. Anyone who does not believe in them, who wants to explain them away and make them plausible by means of some sort of rough ingenuity, will need a great deal of time.¹

1. "Rough ingenuity" here should be understood as a method of historicization or positivising, as Socrates himself makes clear by his examples. Truth is thus reduced to method.

But I have no time for such things; and the reason, my friend, is this. I am still unable, as the Delphic inscription orders, to know myself; and it really seems to me ridiculous to look into other things before I have understood that. This is why I do not concern myself with them. I accept what is generally believed, and, as I was saying, I look not into them but into my own self: Am I a beast more complicated and savage than Typhon, or am I a tamer, simpler animal with a share in a divine and gentle nature? But look, my friend—while we were talking, haven't we reached the tree you were taking us to? (*Phaedrus* 229c–230a)

Who is Phaedrus? He is an Athenian youth, a lover of speeches, and, more important, someone who is later banished by the Athenians into exile for profaning the mysteries. These mysteries are part of a ritual associated with the goddess Persephone. The Hymn to Demeter preserves her story: while she was gathering flowers with her friends, Hades the lord of the underworld seized her and took her to his kingdom. But, like Christ, she conquers death through love and is thus resurrected, offering the hope of immortality to all those who participate in her mysteries. We provide the Christ parallel with great sensitivity, not so much as to make a comment on Christ, but to clarify the often unacknowledged commitments of the commentators on ancient texts. In 415 BCE, as part of a deliberate and violent iconoclastic frenzy, the phallic statues of Hermes, which stood in the front yards of Athenian homes, were mutilated, and the mysteries profaned. Phaedrus, although young, beautiful, and a lover of *logoi* (i.e., semiscientific speeches on various matters), participated in the profanation of the mysteries and mocked the soteriological hope of the Athenians. It is to such an iconoclast, exiled for this reckless act, that Socrates is addressing his speech. Orithuia is a stand-in for Persephone, albeit lacking the goddess's soteriological hope: she is a mortal who simply dies. In the game of philology, matters of life and death hang in a balance. With the technical skill in reading texts comes the awesome responsibility to consider the mortal, philosophical, and ethical ramifications of actions.

Returning to the *Phaedrus*, we detect the positivistic, scientific leanings of Phaedrus. He is interested in speeches that are comprehensive and well-wrought, and he does not believe in either gods or accounts of them. He is a smug technician of words, pointedly without an ethical core. His adolescent, iconoclastic rationalism is either unaware of or puzzled by Socrates' position, and he asks Socrates if he really believes in these tales. This is a question that philology, as it is practiced today, does not explicitly ask, and thus we are grateful to Phaedrus for bringing forth this point. Socrates' answer complicates the violent simplicity of Phaedrus' question. The question presents a false dichotomy: either you believe these tales and you are simplistic, old-fashioned, traditional, and unenlightened, or you do not believe these tales and you are enlightened, scientific, and wise. Plato's genius consists in adding a further layer of complexity to this question: the freedom to think (as Socrates does) and the freedom to act (iconoclastically, as Phaedrus does). Thus, individual and political activism lurks not too far in the background. Phaedrus is exiled, and Socrates, from the temporal point of view of the dialogue, will be executed. Socrates' answer goes beyond the righteous ravings of the so-called enlightened self-determining

individualist and yet does not subscribe to some ancient theocratic authority. Socrates' answer displays a wise pragmatism that will sidestep both the political dichotomy of the individual versus the state and the intellectual dichotomy of belief versus reason.

Turning the tables, Socrates himself offers a dichotomy: either one is clever (*sophôtatos*) and dabbles in the childish task of demythologizing ancient narratives, or one concerns oneself with self-knowledge. Socrates speaks from the point of view of the second option. He is a lover of wisdom (278d). The difference between a mature and immature philology is precisely philosophy. Otherwise, it is a mere technique, a method. Socrates demonstrates that he is fully cognizant of what it is the clever intellectuals do. He himself provides a cameo of the first clever philologist: first disbelief and a pretension to intellectual maturity—to *reject* such tales. Then there is the scientific demythologization: the god must be the North Wind. Then there is a collation of versions ("or, was it perhaps, from Areopagus?"). Finally, there is the forgetting of the seriousness of thinking, replaced instead by a "rough ingenuity" and much industry, that is, a hardworking ethic. Socrates, at least, finds this "amusing."

The serious question here is the "know thyself" *commanded* by the Delphic inscription. Socrates restores the mythic and its task of defining the mortal human being in relation to the divine. It is in that relation that the ultimate concern of being human comes to the fore, the most serious and profound question of the fate that determines our existence: death. Thus, texts that raise the question of life and death or, more pointedly, the work of time and its all-encompassing destructive work require a bit more than this amusing rough ingenuity, a product of those clever nonthinkers who have "a great deal of time." Socrates alerts Phaedrus to the dangers of reducing Persephone to Orithuia by detheologizing narratives: one plays with mortal danger. Orithuia plays with Pharmaceia, who cannot save her. Pharmaceia, as Derrida has shown, is nothing other than writing itself. Thus the second half of this dialogue is devoted to a critique of writing and to textuality in general. Once texts appear, they are always in danger of falling into the hands of those who treat them as dead information. Thus, texts appear as epigrams, mementos of a wisdom that is no longer accessible. Socrates quotes the epigram on the tomb of Midas the Phrygian:

A maid of bronze am I, on Midas' tomb I lie
As long as water flows, and trees grow tall
Shielding the grave where many come to cry
That Midas rests here I say to one and all.²

2. The epigram is unusual because the order of its lines is irrelevant. It makes as much sense whether one begins at the end or the beginning, or anywhere in between. Socrates introduces it as a paradigmatic example of an ill-composed text, one that is not composed with art and with attention to the soul of the listener. The epigram says the same no matter how it is read, and so it really says the same to anyone. It is, for Socrates, the perfect example of a "dead letter." The parallel is relevant here because the text-historical scholars of Indology practice similar mortuary rites: they cut up texts, join up passages from

Fully aware of their mortal error, Socrates continues to wryly mock the positivists of textuality. “I am sure you notice that it makes no difference at all which of its verses comes first and which last.” But Phaedrus has meanwhile grown up, thanks to Socrates’ pedagogy. “You are making fun of our speech, Socrates” (264c–d).

We ask again: what does Plato have to do with philology? Quite a bit. He is the first to use the word *philology*. In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates refers to himself as a “lover of speeches” (*philologoi*, 236e), and in the *Theaetetus*, Socrates speaks of his “love of argument” (*philologia*, 146a). But the most significant discussion of the *philologos* occurs in the *Laches*, where he is contrasted to the *misologos* or the “hater of speech.” Laches says:

I have just one feeling about discussions, Nicias, or, if you like, not one but two, because to some I might seem to be a discussion-lover [*philologos*] and to others a discussion-hater [*misologos*]. Whenever I hear a man discussing virtue or some kind of wisdom, then, if he really is a man and worthy of the words he utters, I am completely delighted to see the appropriateness and harmony existing between the speaker and his words. And such a man seems to me to be genuinely musical, producing the most beautiful harmony, not on the lyre or some other pleasurable instrument, but actually rendering his own life harmonious by fitting his deeds to his words in a truly Dorian mode, not in the Ionian, or even, I think, in the Phrygian or Lydian, but in the only harmony that is genuinely Greek. The discourse of such a man gladdens my heart and makes everyone think that I am a discussion-lover [*philologon*] because of the enthusiastic way in which I welcome what is said; but the man who acts in the opposite way distresses me, and the better he speaks, the worse I feel, so that his discourse makes me look like a discussion-hater [*misologon*]. (*Laches* 188c–e; Sprague trans.)

Laches contrasts the lover of discussion, the *philologos*, with the hater of discussion, the *misologos*. The former is interested in ethics, pursuing virtue, philosophy, and in the beauty of his soul. The latter acts in the opposite way and is distressing to the true “philologist.” To understand the difference between the *philologos* and the *misologos*, however, we must turn to the *Phaedo*, where Socrates provides a first (and his only) definition of *philologia*: philology is linked to the argument for the immortality of the soul. Socrates warns his interlocutors that there is a certain experience they must avoid, namely:

That we should not become misologists [*misologoi*], as people become misanthropes [*misanthrōpoi*]. There is no greater evil one can suffer than to hate reasonable discourse [*logous*]. Misology [*misologia*] and misanthropy [*misanthrōpia*] arise in the same way. Misanthropy comes when a man without knowledge or skill has placed great trust in someone and believes him to be altogether truthful, sound and trustworthy; then, a short time afterwards he finds him to be wicked and unreliable, and then this happens in another case; when one has frequently had that experience,

other texts, read them backward or any which way they like, all the while insisting (as the Phrygian epigram does) that the correct order neither counts nor exists. See especially Willibald Kiefel, *Das Purāṇapañcalakṣaṇa: Versuch einer Textgeschichte* (Bonn: Kurt Schroeder, 1927), the Bible of the textual iconoclasts.

especially with those whom one believed to be one's closest friends, then, in the end, after many such blows, one comes to hate all men and to believe that no one is sound in any way at all. Have you not seen this happen? (*Phaedo* 89d–e; Grube trans.)

When his interlocuter Echecrates assents, Socrates resumes. Here is the entire dialogue that follows between them:

SOCRATES: The similarity lies rather in this: it is as when one who lacks skill in arguments puts his trust in an argument as being true, then shortly afterwards believes it to be false—as sometimes it is and sometimes it is not—and so with another argument and then another. You know how those in particular who spend their time studying contradiction in the end believe themselves to have become very wise and that they alone have understood that there is no soundness or reliability in any object or in any argument, but that all that exists simply fluctuates up and down as if it were in the Euripus and does not remain in the same place for any time at all.

PHAEDO: What you say, I said, is certainly true.

SOCRATES: It would be pitiable, Phaedo, he said, when there is a true and reliable argument and one that can be understood, if a man who has dealt with such arguments as appear at one time true, at another time untrue, should not blame himself or his own lack of skill but, because of his distress, in the end gladly shift the blame away from himself to the arguments, and spend the rest of his life hating and reviling reasonable discussion and so be deprived of truth and knowledge of reality.

PHAEDO: Yes, by Zeus, I said, that would be pitiable indeed.

SOCRATES: This then is the first thing we should guard against, he said. We should not allow into our minds the conviction that argumentation has nothing sound about it; much rather we should believe that it is we who are not yet sound and that we must take courage and be eager to attain soundness, you and the others for the sake of your whole life to come, and I for the sake of death. (*Phaedo* 90b–91a)

What Socrates literally says is: those who perish between a speech and its opposite (*peri tous antilogous logous diatripsantes*, 90c); we may link this to the argument for the immortality of the soul which is compared to Ariadne's thread and which may not be broken and which recalls the twine by means of which Theseus was able to find his way back out of the Cretan labyrinth. Thus, what is at stake in philology is emphatically not the *logos* itself, but a certain discriminative stance that allows the reader or listener to distinguish between the *logos* and its opposite and thus, like Theseus, safely navigate home through them. In contrast, the one who hates the *logos*, says Socrates, loses access to truth and knowledge (*aletheias te kai epistēmēs*) of the things that are (*tōn de ontōn*, 90d).³

3. Cf. Arjuna's question of Kṛṣṇa in the Bhagavadgītā: "Still, Kṛṣṇa, a non-ascetic who, while having faith, allows his mind to stray from this yoga before he achieves the ultimate

As it is precisely this confrontation between the meaninglessness of mortal existence and the need for ethical action that philosophical texts such as the Mahābhārata and the Bhagavadgītā address, we focus on these two texts as paradigmatic of the struggle of the German Indologist against philosophical, ethical, and normative concerns. However, as a positive interpretation of these texts remains beyond the scope of this work (for one must first overcome the prejudices against such an interpretation), let us now proceed with the deconstruction of this later philology (“Afterphilologie,” as Rohde calls it).

success of yoga—what becomes of him? Does he not, like a shredded cloud, fade away, a failure either way, strong-armed lord, without foundation and astray on the path to *brahman*?” (6.37–38; the translation is van Buitenen’s; J. A. B. van Buitenen, trans., *The Bhagavadgītā in the Mahābhārata* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981]).

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INTRODUCTION

The root of evil (in theology) is the confusion between the text and the word of God.

J. S. Semler, *Abhandlung von freier Untersuchung des Canon*

A HISTORY OF GERMAN INDOLOGY

This book investigates German scholarship on India between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries against the backdrop of its methodological self-understanding. It pursues this inquiry out of a wider interest in German philosophy of the same period, especially as concerns debates over scientific method. This twofold focus, that is, on the history of German Indology and on the idea of scientific method, is determined by the subject itself: because German Indology largely defined itself in terms of a specific method (the historical-critical method or the text-historical method),¹

1. The “historical-critical method” is a broad term for a method applied in biblical criticism. The method sets aside the theological meaning of the Bible in favor of its historical context. The method can be summed up as “understanding the Bible out of [the conditions of] its time.” (The phrase is a common one, and used, for instance in both Tschackert’s article and as the title of Reventlow’s article; for both sources, see the third section of this chapter.) Within the confines of this method, scholars have developed and applied various techniques, such as literary criticism (*Literaturkritik*), form criticism (*Formkritik*), tendency criticism (*Tendenzkritik*), and determining the history of transmission or of redaction(s) (*Überlieferungsgeschichte*, *Redaktionsgeschichte*) and of the text (*Textgeschichte*). The last, especially in the adjectival form “text-historical [method]” (*textgeschichtliche Methode*) is often used as synonymous with the “historical-critical method” as it encompasses the largest part of its historical tendency. In this work, we use them interchangeably. *Historical-critical method* is used preferentially when discussing the method’s historical origins (i.e., as a school), *text-historical method* when referring to its application to Indian texts (i.e., in reconstructing histories of the text). As the present work demonstrates, the application of the text-historical method is not scientific, and caution must be exercised in using the terms *text-historical* or *textual history*: in the majority of cases, the textual histories German scholars came up with using this method were a projection of their fantasies. A standard but hardly critical overview of these steps can be found in Odil Hannes Steck, *Old Testament Exegesis: A Guide to the Methodology*, trans. James D. Nogalski (Atlanta, Scholar’s Press, 1995).

a history of German Indology is simultaneously a history of method. In other words, the history we trace here is not the history of the establishment and growth of scholarship on ancient India in Germany during this period.² Nor is it a cultural history of German-Indian contacts (which has been pursued more or less critically elsewhere).³ That there was an unprecedented surge in interest in India in nineteenth-century Germany does not need to be restated here,⁴ nor do we need to examine the factors (Romantic interest in the Orient, imagined affinity to the ancient Germanic race, longings for a pristine civilization, etc.) that fueled this surge. These issues have been dealt with at length elsewhere.⁵ The reader wishing to learn more about these historical details is referred to the many excellent studies on these subjects.⁶ This book is also not a disciplinary history in the sense that it recounts details of departments or scholars (who studied what with whom, which department established what profile when, etc.).⁷

2. By far the most comprehensive is Douglas T. McGetchin, *Indology, Indomania, and Orientalism: Ancient India's Rebirth in Modern Germany* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2009).

3. Among the latter genre, the standard work is Wilhelm Halbfass's *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988). Decidedly less objective and less useful, in contrast, are the works motivated by a desire to present a unique proximity between Indian and German culture; examples include Ludwig Alsdorf, *Deutsch-indische Geistesbeziehungen* (Heidelberg: Kurt Vowinckel, 1942) and Helmuth von Glasenapp, *Das Indienbild deutscher Denker* (Stuttgart: K. F. Koehler, 1960).

4. For an examination of this growth from a comparative perspective (i.e., with French and British Indology), see Pascale Rabault-Feuerhahn, *L'archive des origines: Sanskrit, philologie, anthropologie dans l'Allemagne du XIXe siècle* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2008). Suzanne Marchand (*German Orientalism in the Age of Empire: Religion, Race, and Scholarship* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010]) also discusses this growth, albeit from a different perspective.

5. The Romantic inheritance of German Indology is dealt with in Nicholas A. Germana, *The Orient of Europe: The Mythical Image of India and Competing Images of German National Identity* (Newcastle upon Tyne Cambridge Scholars, 2009) and, from a slightly different perspective, in Tuska E. Benes, *In Babel's Shadow: Language, Philology, and the Nation in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2008). Tod Kontje discusses the discourse on affinities in his *German Orientalisms* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004). Although George S. Williamson's *The Longing for Myth in Germany: Religion and Aesthetic Culture from Romanticism to Nietzsche* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004) has a broader focus, it is also relevant to Indology. Two early but still influential and enriching works on the unspoiled, exotic Orient are Dorothy M. Figueira, *Translating the Orient: The Reception of Sakuntala in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994) and *The Exotic: A Decadent Quest* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).

6. Not mentioned here are the numerous works on individual scholars or the extensive literature from a Saidian perspective on the subject of German Orientalism, as they are not germane to this book's theme. The reader is referred to McGetchin's book for a comprehensive review of the scholarship.

7. Indra Sengupta has produced detailed analyses of these institutional aspects of Indology; see her *From Salon to Discipline: State, University and Indology in Germany, 1821–1914* (Heidelberg: Ergon Verlag, 2005). Also see her “*Shishyas of Another Order: Students of Indology at the Universities of Bonn and Berlin*” and “*State, University, and Indology: The Politics of the Chair of Indology at German Universities in the Nineteenth Century*,” both

Conditioned by the nature of the inquiry, there is some biographic information on the principal protagonists of this history,⁸ but our main focus is on elucidating how these personal biographies tied in with a certain understanding of method.

In what sense, then, is this book a history? The history dealt with in this book is *discipline-reflexive*,⁹ by which we mean it studies the self-presentation or self-understanding of the discipline's practitioners: how did they view their discipline? In what way did they see themselves as contributing to the task of translating or clarifying Indian literature to European audiences? What were the means, the arguments, or the strategies used to justify their role as official purveyors of Indian culture to these audiences, and what role did the rhetoric of science and scientificity play in these arguments?¹⁰

To be sure, this book also addresses wider historical issues, such as the longing for national identity (seen most dramatically in the creation of an Āryan ideology) and the institutional dominance of German scholarship (which was to influence scholars of other nations into thinking that they, too, had to pursue Sanskrit studies in a German key), but these issues remain tangential to our central concerns. Thus, although the first chapter is framed as a discussion of the epic fantasies of early German Indologists (Christian Lassen, Albrecht Weber, the two Holtzmanns¹¹), the chapter is not intended as yet another contribution to the genre of "how did

in *Sanskrit and "Orientalism": Indology and Comparative Linguistics in Germany, 1750–1958*, ed. Douglas T. McGetchin, Peter K. J. Park, and Damodar SarDesai (Delhi: Manohar, 2004), 137–71 and 271–305. McGetchin also includes two useful charts detailing the genealogies of German Indologists in his *Indology, Indomania, and Orientalism*, 81 and 82–83.

8. The materials presented here are but a fraction of the total materials gathered in the course of research, as the book originated in a much narrower project: intellectual biographies and bibliographies of the main German Gītā scholars. However, as the book's focus widened, much of this material was edited out. See, however, the entry on German Indology at *Oxford Bibliographies Online* (www.oxfordbibliographies.com) for a useful survey of the field.

9. The term is Howard's; see Thomas Albert Howard, *Protestant Theology and the Making of the Modern German University* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 11. However, as we use the term, we intend not only a consideration of these documents but also the application of a "hermeneutics of suspicion." Perhaps the word *discipline-critical* would have been better.

10. The terms translated here as "science" and "scientificity" are *Wissenschaft* and *Wissenschaftlichkeit*. The latter is occasionally also translated "scientism," when we want to express its ideological use in German Indology. "Scientificity" is the rhetoric of "science" applied by Indology; "scientism" is this rhetoric viewed as a historical formation. Treatments of the rhetoric of "scientificity" can be found in Howard, *Protestant Theology* (especially concerning "scientificity" as the hallmark of Protestant scholarship as compared to Catholic) and in Sheldon Pollock, "Deep Orientalism? Notes on Sanskrit and Power beyond the Raj," in *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia*, ed. Peter van der Veer and Carol A. Breckenridge (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 76–133 (concerning the role played by the rhetoric of scientificity in National Socialist ideology).

11. Both Adolf Holtzmann Sr. and his nephew Adolf Holtzmann Jr. wrote books on the Mahābhārata. For clarity's sake, whenever we mention Holtzmann without any further specification, the reference is to the younger Holtzmann. Whenever we cite the uncle, we will always specify that it is the elder Holtzmann that is meant.

German Indology contribute to Āryanism?” or “how did German Indology contribute to National Socialism?” literature.¹² Without negating the importance of this literature and without denying the responsibility German Indology bears for these events, our book does not use German Indology as a lens to peer at wider German history. Rather, the focus remains squarely on the writings themselves and, above all, on the writers: what agendas, textual and otherwise, were they working out in their writings? What role did the idea of India play in these agendas, and how was this idea expressed, reformulated, or otherwise adapted to suit these agendas? What understanding of science and scientific method was operative in their researches?

The history we trace here is the internal history of German Indology: the history that does not appear in its official histories (Ernst Windisch, Theodor Benfey, Valentina Stache-Rosen, et al.)¹³ but is also not apparent from its nonofficial histories (however useful they may otherwise be).¹⁴ The present work differs from these in that it is both more specific and broader: more specific, because it is interested only in the development of the self-understanding of German Indology as a textual science;¹⁵ broader, because it makes general points regarding the nature of this textual science and especially the way

12. On the former, see the relevant sections in Ruth Römer, *Sprachwissenschaft und Rassenideologie in Deutschland* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1985) and Thomas R. Trautmann, *Aryans and British India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). Léon Poliakov's *The Aryan Myth: A History of Racist and Nationalistic Ideas in Europe* (New York: Basic Books, 1974) is the archetype of all such works. On the latter, see Pollock, “Deep Orientalism?”

13. Ernst Windisch, *Geschichte der Sanskrit-Philologie und Indischen Altertumskunde*, 2 vols. (Strassburg: Trübner, 1917–20); Theodor Benfey, *Geschichte der Sprachwissenschaft und Orientalischen Philologie in Deutschland seit dem Anfange des 19. Jahrhunderts mit einem Rückblick auf die Früheren* (Munich: J. G. Cotta, 1869); Valentina Stache-Rosen, *German Indologists: Biographies of German Scholars in Indian Studies Writing in German* (New Delhi: Max Mueller Bhavan, 1981); second revised edition by Agnes Stache-Weiske (New Delhi: Max Mueller Bhavan, 1990). Ernst Windisch's 1917–20 book is the insider's version of the discipline, highly flawed, as is Stache-Rosen. A newcomer to this genre of hagiographic writing is Jürgen Hanneder (see his *Marburger Indologie im Umbruch: Zur Geschichte des Faches 1845–1945* [Munich: P. Kirchheim Verlag, 2010]).

14. The tremendous growth in interest in examining this underilluminated and undertheorized aspect of German history is surely a welcome development. Besides the historical works mentioned, there are a number of literary treatments (e.g., Gita Dharampal-Frick's *Indien im Spiegel deutscher Quellen der Frühen Neuzeit* [Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1994] and Kamakshi Murti's *India: The Seductive and Seduced “Other” of German Orientalism* [Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2001]). In addition, there are the edited volumes produced by Douglas T. McGetchin, Peter K. J. Park, and Damodar SarDesai (*Sanskrit and “Orientalism”: Indology and Comparative Linguistics in Germany, 1750–1958* [New Delhi: Manohar, 2004]); Eli Franco and Karin Preisendanz (*Beyond Orientalism: The Work of Wilhelm Halbfass and Its Impact on Indian and Cross-Cultural Studies* [Atlanta: Rodopi, 1997]); and Fred. R. Dallmayr (*Beyond Orientalism* [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996]). The reason this book does not engage many of these works is because its concerns are somewhat different and highly specific.

15. In that sense, the book it comes closest to is Tuska Benes's *In Babel's Shadow*, which also examines the link between this new philology and nationalism. However, this book makes points that are more closely related to the origins of this new philology in the scriptural hermeneutics associated with the Neo-Protestantism of the eighteenth century. In that sense, its most direct predecessors are Thomas Albert Howard's *Protestant Theology and the Making of the Modern German University* and *Religion and the Rise of Historicism: W. M.*

this science has been used to delegitimize an entire alternative tradition of hermeneutics, that “other philology” as we call it, which has its origins not in nineteenth-century Germany but in ancient Greece, specifically the Greek concern for the mortal soul.¹⁶

In this sense, the history traced here is more accurately described as a genealogy of method in Indology.¹⁷ Its focus is not on the great and official monuments (documents, events, authorized histories, or biographies) that mark the history of this discipline, but on the hidden and the obscure: the documents or events that, for one or the other reason, Indology has found convenient to forget, the origins it has buried or repressed.¹⁸ For example, we begin not with the self-important pronouncements of Hermann Oldenberg,¹⁹ but with two relatively minor German Orientalists: Adolf Holtzmann Sr. and Adolf Holtzmann Jr. And yet, it is our claim that it is precisely in the work of these and other writers, neglected as marginal and at odds with the image of itself German Indology sought to project (enlightened, rational, posttheological, and postconfessional), that we find the greatest clues to Indology’s textual project. By continuously shifting focus back and forth between its official communiqués (by

L. de Wette, Jacob Burckhardt, and the Theological Origins of Nineteenth-Century Historicism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Then again, its central chapter (on the Bhagavadgītā) owes much to Bradley L. Herling’s excellent and informative *The German Gītā: Hermeneutics and Discipline in the German Reception of Indian Thought, 1778–1831* (New York: Routledge, 2006), although it begins after the point where Herling leaves off. Herling covers the first phase of Gītā reception in Germany, beginning with the work of J. G. Herder (1792) and F. W. Schlegel (1808) and continuing all the way to Hegel (1827 and 1831). We pick up the story in the second phase of Gītā reception in Germany with the Gītā interpretations of the Indologists Adolf Holtzmann Jr. (1893), Richard Garbe (1905), Hermann Jacobi (1918), Hermann Oldenberg (1919), Rudolf Otto (1934), and Jakob Wilhelm Hauer (1937). Between these two phases, we might identify a transition phase, characterized by the Gītās of C. R. S. Peiper (1834), Christian Lassen (1846, a revised edition of A. W. Schlegel’s Gītā of 1823), F. Lorinser (1869), and Robert Boxberger (1870) (see bibliography for complete entries). This phase is dealt with in the first chapter as a prologue to our discussion of the German reception of the Mahābhārata.

16. Thus, this book’s direct inspiration is ultimately the radical philology of Nietzsche (articulated, among other works, in his *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music*) and its contemporary descendants, such as the work of Sean Alexander Gurd (see his *Iphigenias at Aulis: Textual Multiplicity, Radical Philology* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005]). It also owes a tremendous debt to Reiner Schürmann, especially his *Broken Hegemonies*, trans. Reginald Lilly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003).

17. The expression “Indology” translates the German *Indologie* and is used here as a broad term for a number of disciplines concerned with the study of the literary cultures of ancient India. It has been chosen because it is ultimately the term that established itself in German over against other possible terms, such as *Indische Literatur*, *Indische Philologie*, *Indische Altertumskunde*, *Orientalische Philologie*, *Vergleichende Sprachwissenschaft*, *Sanskrit Philologie*, and *Indogermanische Studien*. All these terms refer, with slight differences in accent, to the study of Indian texts on the basis of a method known as the “historical-critical method”—although even that term has meant different things to different people at different times (see later).

18. This will ultimately turn out to be its origins in the Neo-Protestantism of the eighteenth century (see later) and its resulting theological inheritance.

19. Oldenberg’s extensive writings on the subject are discussed in chapter 5. Also see the bibliography for a complete list.

Indologists such as Hermann Oldenberg, Walter Slaje, Jürgen Hanneder) and its historical reality (the work of Indologists such as Richard von Garbe, Hermann Jacobi, Georg von Simson, and Erich Frauwallner), we break up the monolithic narrative of an enlightened nonpolitical, nonideological science. In that respect, the function of the history recounted here is to trace the vicissitudes of this passing phenomenon, which, for a brief chapter in European history, advanced a claim to being science and dominated Europe's encounter with the Orient.²⁰

Is the history we present teleological? Is it essentializing? By narrowly defining the scope of inquiry as German interpretations of the Mahābhārata and the Bhagavadgītā insofar as they are based on the historical-critical method and reflect certain Enlightenment and Protestant anxieties, we avoid the problem of a teleological narrative. Further, if one can at all speak of a telos here, it is a negative telos: we do not explain how the discipline arose, but how it ended. Thus, it is really the dispersal or *diremption* of the text-historical method at the end of the twentieth century that interests us.²¹ Far from essentializing something called German Indology, we deconstruct this idea. If *genealogy* is defined as the endeavor "to identify the accidents, the minute deviations—or conversely, the complete reversals—the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us; it is to discover that truth or being does not lie at the root of what we know and what we are, but [only] the exteriority of accidents,"²² then the aim of this book can be summed up as showing how "truth or being does not lie at the root of what we know" (or think we know) about German Indology and how the knowledge about India that we think we possess in German Indology is "but the exteriority of accidents."²³ What are the ways, historically conditioned, in which we have been trained to think about Indian texts, and what are the problems with these ways, once we examine them in the light of the understanding of method in the European humanities? How did a method that was radically theological in its origins capture the imagination of Sanskritists around the globe and become identified with the ideal of objective, scientific investigation into Indian texts tout court? What are the broader consequences that can be drawn from the *diremption* of this method in German Indology for the humanities? These are some of the questions pursued by this study.

20. At least, at an institutional level. But the contemporary irrelevance of German Indology is testament to the fact that it never adequately met nor understood the German public's interest in India after the Second World War.

21. See the bibliography for a number of texts attempting to survey the field. For obvious reasons, most of these works are now out of date, but a comparison of the number of departments listed with the number of departments still surviving is instructive. Also see McGetchin, *Indology, Indomania, and Orientalism*, especially the chapter "The Study of Sanskrit in German Universities, 1818–1914" for a comparison with the situation in Indology's heyday.

22. Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984*, vol. 2, *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: New Press, 1998), 374.

23. For preliminary work in this direction, see Vishwa Adluri, Review of *Unifying Hinduism: Philosophy and Identity in Hindu Intellectual History*, by Andrew J. Nicholson, *Humanities and Social Sciences Online* (H-Net), March 22, 2012, www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=32207.

THE HISTORY OF GERMAN INDOLOGY AS A HISTORY OF METHOD

There are two reasons for this book's focus on a narrower history of method.²⁴ The first is pragmatic: because German Indology defines itself in terms of a unique methodological access to Indian texts, when seeking to define what makes German Indology *German* Indology, we have to look at method rather than, say, race or national identity. Pollock has found that these issues did inform the praxis of German Indology,²⁵ but the international acceptance of this mode of "doing" Indology cannot be explained if one defines *German Indology* tautologically as "Indology done by Germans."²⁶ This is not to deny that German Indologists did see themselves as unique vis-à-vis their American or British colleagues,²⁷ but to highlight the fact that this sense of uniqueness was founded on the consciousness of possessing a unique (and superior) *method*.²⁸ However, a brief look at that method sufficed to show its problematic antecedents: the historical-critical method is a creation of the Neo-Protestantism (*Neuprotestantismus*) of the eighteenth century (as discussed later) and hence singularly unsuited to the task of a global, objective, and secular Indology.²⁹ There was something fundamentally wrong about the way German Indologists perceived themselves. The perception gap between their self-assessment and their reality led to the formulation of the fundamental question of this book: what happens when one sets aside what Indologists say they do (or think that it is they are doing) and focuses instead on what they actually do?³⁰

24. Narrower, that is, as compared with the scope of a general cultural history, not narrower with regard to its implications, which, as we show, are wide-ranging.

25. Pollock, "Deep Orientalism?"

26. Thus, among "German" Indologists, we also include a number of American scholars, including E. W. Hopkins and his latter-day incarnations James L. Fitzgerald and Kevin McGrath. The story of why American scholars were by and large (an important exception is Alf Hiltebeitel) unable to evolve an independent and self-confident approach to the Indian epic is a topic for a future work.

27. For a discussion, see Vishwa Adluri, "Pride and Prejudice: Orientalism and German Indology," *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 15, no. 3 (2011): 253–92.

28. See, for example, the comments by Oldenberg, Hacker, Slaje, von Stietencron, and Hanneder cited later.

29. Friedrich Wilhelm Graf ("Zur Begriffsgeschichte einer theologischen Chiffre," *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* 28 [1984]: 214–68) attributes the term to F. C. Bauer. It has often been used as a synonym for the more widely used *Kulturprotestantismus*; nonetheless, as the latter has, at times, also been used pejoratively, we shall retain the term "Neo-Protestantism."

30. Such a question, of course, cannot lead to contrasting words, written or otherwise imparted, with the way Indologists conduct themselves in their private lives. The point was not to show that private religion existed alongside its public disavowal, which would only correspond to the Kantian separation of the public and private realms and thus reinstate the German sense of somehow having banished religion from public life. Rather, the question became: can one detect, beyond or behind the overt comments German Indologists make or have made regarding their discipline, the faint lines of a religion, a theological inheritance that the Indologists might themselves not be aware of any longer? In that case, one would have to read this literature again with a view to its religious subtext, applying what Ricoeur, following Heidegger, has called a "hermeneutics of suspicion."

This initial set of reflections defined the shape of this study. Because German Indology defined itself in terms of a method (philology), but that method, in turn, turned out to have a specific historical origin (in German academic theology), a history of German Indology had to be pursued as a history of philology. This history occupies the first four chapters of this book. We then return to the question of the allegedly scientific character of German Indology in the fifth chapter. Here we find that although the method in Indology is informed by scientific positivism, this is only partially so.³¹

To anticipate the conclusions of these five chapters: Indology is an ill-conceived theology that rests on an incomplete positivism for its defense, or it is a stillborn positivism that is still hamstrung by a latent theology. In either case, it can be called a science only if by this we mean the institutional and hegemonic aspects of science rather than a rational, axiomatic, and universally demonstrable body of knowledge.³²

The second reason for focusing on a history of method was historical. The public statements of Indologists such as Hermann Oldenberg, Willibald Kirfel, and Paul Hacker showed that German Indologists were ill-informed about this history. Although they accepted and even valorized the historical-critical method as the fundament of their discipline, they were ignorant of its origins in the work of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century theologians and biblical critics J. S. Semler, G. L. Bauer, and F. C. Bauer.

Thus arose a second complex of tasks for this study. It was not only that the Indologists were in error about what they thought they were doing *but also that they were in error about their history*. In fact, we found that no one in the history of German Indology had actually undertaken a concrete examination of exactly when and where a break with theology had occurred in the history of this discipline. When German scholars spoke of the objectivity and agnosticism of the historical-critical method vis-à-vis the commentarial tradition, it was clear they did not mean this in a sense that was discipline-specific: they were merely assuming that their discipline, born in the aftermath of the struggle between science and faith in the Enlightenment, lacked a theological or metaphysical component. It is true that a general secularization of European life took place in the nineteenth century,³³ but this cannot suffice

31. McGetchin makes a similar argument regarding the Romantic roots of Indology in Germany. However, our focus in this book is less on the Romantic inheritance of Indology (which, as McGetchin shows, was much greater than Indologists have historically been willing to concede) than on its theological inheritance, mediated via its adoption of historical methods and its faith in the critical potential of these methods to deconstruct traditional sources of authority.

32. See Toulmin, who argues that there are two ways in which one can think of a science: "We can think of it as a discipline, comprising a communal tradition of procedures and techniques for dealing with theoretical or practical problems; or we can think of it as a profession, comprising the organized set of institutions, roles, and men whose task it is to apply or improve those procedures and techniques." Stephen Toulmin, *Human Understanding* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972), 142. German Indology meets the latter definition, but, as we show in this book, it fails to meet the former.

33. The thesis has been advanced most persuasively in Owen Chadwick's book, appropriately titled *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975). For a contesting view, see Howard's *Religion and the Rise of Historicism*, cited earlier. In his recent book, Howard takes the

as evidence of the secularism of Indology. It is not at all clear that this secularization was devoid of a religious element. Scholars have debated at length about the nature of the secularization Europe is supposed to have undergone in a debate that has pitted the defenders of the secularization thesis or secularization paradigm (Steve Bruce being the most prominent among them)³⁴ against opponents of the thesis (e.g., David Martin, whose work brings much needed nuance and complexity to the thesis).³⁵ Some have called attention to the fact that this presumed secularization was, in fact, no such thing, being rather another stage in the religious history of Europe itself.³⁶ Far from the teleological narrative of history as a progression from the darkness of religious orthodoxy and superstition to the Enlightenment, the overt secularization of public institutions in the nineteenth century has left behind a complex and ambiguous legacy.³⁷ Talal Asad has recently opposed: “a straightforward narrative of progress from the religious to the secular is no longer acceptable.”³⁸ But even on a charitable reading of the Enlightenment (i.e., one that views it as it wishes to see itself and be seen by others), it is clear that secularization did not take place in the same way and to the same extent in all areas. There was need for greater precision. One would have to undertake individual and microscopic-scale analyses of the individual disciplines themselves before one could assume this or that discipline was secular. Further, what of Indology itself? There were no studies of German Indology we were aware of from the point of view of its relationship to religion.³⁹ Was it really as secular and universal as its practitioners claimed?

view that the term (i.e., secularization) is “useful in a limited, heuristic sense, particularly when applied to cultural realities in Western Europe since the Enlightenment” but points out that “a priori notions of secularization have created great historiographical lacunae.” Howard, *Protestant Theology and the Making of the Modern German University* 8, no. 29. It is in this sense that we concede a general secularization of European life here, although, as we shall see, this does not suffice to explain the continued presence of concerns that might be properly called religious and theological in German Indology.

34. See his *God Is Dead: Secularization in the West* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2002), among numerous other articles.

35. See his *A General Theory of Secularization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978) and *On Secularization: Towards a Revised General Theory* (Aldershot Ashgate, 2005).

36. Among those to have made this claim most strongly is S. N. Balagangadhara, *The Heathen in His Blindness: Asia, the West & the Dynamic of Religion* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994).

37. Of course, only a part of what is at stake in this debate concerns Europe’s historical reality: a greater part is concerned with the thesis that increasing modernity is necessarily accompanied by increasing secularism. Among those to have reconsidered this view is Peter Berger.

38. Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 1.

39. Marchand’s recent book does draw some connections, but for Orientalist disciplines more generally, as she does not delve into Indology specifically. Her work provides an important corrective to Said’s analysis, showing how scholarly concerns (mediated by Christian concerns with a universal narrative of history) played a significant role in German Orientalism. However, Marchand is simultaneously less critical (of the ideological potential of this scholarship) and more hopeful (of its emancipatory potential for a “fully universal *Kulturgeschichte*” [*German Orientalism in the Age of Empire*, 495]) than we are. In contrast, we see the practice of constructing such universal narratives itself as a remnant of Christian tradition. Bradley L. Herling (*The German Gita*) and Peter K. J. Park (“A Catholic

This complex of questions forms a second axis of inquiry for this study. Whereas the first studies the history of German Indology from the perspective of its method, the second required us to address this history from the perspective of biography. Where and in what way were German Indologists concealed theologians? What was hindering them from being clear about their theological commitments? In what way and to what extent could German Indology be treated as a posttheological, postconfessional discipline? Once again, we trace these issues through the next four chapters of this book. In the concluding section of the fourth chapter, we take up the question of German Indology as a Neo-Brahmanic hierarchy (that is itself a Neo-Protestant legacy). Here we demonstrate how this new church of historicism constituted itself by giving itself a public mission (purification of Indian texts), an aesthetic ideal (the philologically tamed and purified text, whose antithesis is the “monstrous” Indian epic⁴⁰), and a clerical order (the scientist-scholars who must be defended, even when they are National Socialists⁴¹). The fifth chapter then presents the “science” portion of our argument. We conclude with a brief résumé of the book’s argument.

The intersection of these two axes (method-philology and biography-theology) constitutes the vantage from which we contemplate the history of German Indology. This doubled perspective also explains the book’s interweaving of textual-philological materials (Holtzmann’s critical analysis of the Mahābhārata, Garbe and colleagues’ reconstructions of the Bhagavadgītā) with biographic-interpretive materials (Oldenberg’s views on Indian philology vis-à-vis classical philology, Slaje’s remarks on Indology as part of the landscape of the humanities, Hanneder’s views on the need for a functional Indology as a bulwark against the forces of religious fundamentalism). Finally, because both questions of scientific method and religious outlook are intimately bound up with the position of a discipline at the university, occasionally this book also enters domains that might be considered political. Especially toward the end of the book, we do ask what the justification for Indology is. But these questions remain subsidiary to the project of illuminating the theological inheritance of Indology. In the next section, we discuss how the historical-critical method originates in debates concerning the interpretation of scripture in eighteenth-century Neo-Protestantism. It is this Neo-Protestant inheritance, we contend, that is the key to understanding German Indology.

Apologist in a Pantheistic World: New Approaches to Friedrich Schlegel,” in *Sanskrit and Orientalism: Indology and Comparative Linguistics in Germany, 1750–1958*, ed. Damodar SarDesai, Peter K. J. Park, and Douglas McGetchin [Delhi: Manohar, 2004], 83–106) have both commented on the significance of the pantheism debate for German attitudes to Indian philosophy. But to the extent that their work focuses more on the first, philosophical phase of the German reception of Indian thought, it is true that, as yet, there have been no studies of German Indology from the perspective of its theological commitments.

40. For the expression, see Hermann Oldenberg, *Das Mahābhārata: Sein Inhalt, seine Entstehung, seine Form* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1922), 1, 2, 16, and 172.

41. For examples, see the work of Steinkellner and Slaje, discussed at various points in this book.

THE ORIGINS OF THE HISTORICAL-CRITICAL METHOD IN THE NEO-PROTESTANTISM OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Our interest in a history of German Indology had generated the task of a history of method. The latter, in turn, had generated the need for a history of German Indology. The question of *what* German Indology was could not be answered unless we answered the question of what its *method* was, and the question of what its method was required us to examine the history of the discipline. Neither question could be answered unless we first looked at the *origins* of the method used in German Indology: origins that lay not in Indology itself, but in the Neo-Protestantism of the eighteenth century. Thus, at the outset some understanding of this background becomes unavoidable.

Although German Indologists speak of their method broadly as the philological method, this requires greater precision, for *philology* can mean and has meant many different things to many different people.⁴² At the outset, it is important to distinguish between two senses of textual criticism or critical method: a broader sense and a narrower sense. In the broader sense, the expressions imply any inquiry that takes a critical stance toward its objects. Drawing on a Kantian heritage, this concept of criticism or critique (*Kritik*) is too wide to be useful unless one specifies what is critical about this critique. In Kant, *Kritik* has two primary senses: first, a suspicion of traditional authority (specifically, spiritual authority; this is the sense that comes to the fore in his essay “What Is Enlightenment?” and other writings such as “Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone”) and, second, a criticism of dogmatic metaphysics (this is the sense that is at the bottom of his critical philosophy proper, i.e., the three great *Critiques*). It is not necessary to trace the further history of the concept of criticism here.⁴³ Note, however, that it is not the second sense that comes down to German Indology, which neither is nor wishes to be philosophy, and the thought of critiquing metaphysics from the perspective of a reflection on the “two sources of human cognition” is as far removed from the minds of Indologists as possible.

Likewise, the sense of criticism found in German Indology is not the second, narrower, more technical sense of this term. In this latter sense, the expressions “textual criticism” or “critical method” refer to the two-stage process of a systematic *recensio* (collection and analysis of manuscripts), followed by an analysis of the relations of filiation between these manuscripts based on this *recensio*. This process culminates in a mechanical reconstruction of the archetype (the oldest text from which all extant manuscripts are derived). This is the method that has become famous under the name of “Lachmann’s method,” and it is this (or its latter-day variations, e.g.,

42. For a history of the term, see Axel Horstmann, “Philologie,” in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, vol. 7, ed. Joachim Ritter and Karlfried Gründer (Basel: Schwabe, 1989), 552–72. Plato is the first to use the term *philologia* in the *Theaetetus* (146a); he also uses the related *philologos* (*Theaetetus* 161a; *Laches* 188c, 188e; *Phaedrus* 236e), as discussed earlier.

43. But see Kurt Röttgers, *Kritik und Praxis: Zur Geschichte des Kritikbegriffs von Kant bis Marx* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1974) for an excellent overview of this history.

the anti-Lachmannism of Joseph Bédier and his followers or the neo-Lachmannism of Giorgio Pasquali and the Italian School) that philologists mean when they speak of textual criticism.⁴⁴ The method is critical because it seeks to eliminate sources of subjective influence (e.g., the editor's personal views of the tradition) by making the process of the reconstruction of the archetype as mechanical as possible and because it insists that every stage of the process be documented so as to enable other scholars to follow, review, and, if need be, make changes to editorial choices.⁴⁵

This leaves the third possibility: the sense of *criticism* found in German Indology is inherited from the first of Kant's two senses; that is, it implies a suspicion of traditional authority. This is the sense operative in Indology.⁴⁶

But a generalized suspicion does not yet amount to a *method*. For this, we have to look at a second historical source of influence upon German Indology: the area of scriptural hermeneutics, especially as developed and practiced by scholars such as J. S. Semler and F. C. Bauer in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Although his name is all but forgotten by Indologists today, Johann Salomo Semler (1725–91) was one of the leading Protestant theologians of the eighteenth century and the father of the historical-critical method. Born in a family of Lutheran pastors (his father Matthias Nicolaus Semler was pastor of Saalfeld; his mother was the daughter of a Lutheran pastor), Semler was initially deeply influenced by Pietism but later distanced himself from the Pietists, mainly due to their opposition to science and to historical research. From 1743 to 1750, Semler studied theology in Halle with Baumgarten, one of the leading *Übergangstheologen* (transition theologians) of his day. It is mainly due to Baumgarten's influence and patronage that he became one of the foremost *Aufklärungstheologen* (Enlightenment theologians) of the eighteenth century. Baumgarten was a representative of the Wolffian school of Enlightenment philosophy and was especially interested in applying methods of historical interpretation and rational demonstration (the latter borrowed from Wolff's philosophy) to scripture. Scholars consider Baumgarten to be a forerunner of the historical-critical method, but it was his student who took the final step of separating the contingent historical aspects of scripture from its ethical and religious content. In doing so, Semler enabled a strictly historical understanding of scripture, albeit at the price of

44. The question of whether the expression "Lachmann's method" can at all be used as an accurate description of what scholars today understand by "textual criticism" is one that need not concern us here. It has become commonplace to refer to textual criticism by this name, even though, as Timpanaro demonstrates in his book, Lachmann had many important predecessors and was neither especially consistent in his use of stemmatic analysis nor its greatest champion. See Sebastiano Timpanaro, *The Genesis of Lachmann's Method*, trans. G. W. Most (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

45. For an excellent overview of the basic steps of the method, see Glenn W. Most's excellent "Editor's Introduction," in Sebastiano Timpanaro, *The Genesis of Lachmann's Method*, trans. G. W. Most (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 1–32.

46. See, for example, Oldenberg's and von Stietencron's comments (both cited later) regarding the untenability of setting out from the traditional view, disparagingly referred to by Oldenberg as "Inderwissen" (Indian knowledge).

dissolving the identification of God's Word with holy scripture characteristic of old Protestantism.⁴⁷

Semler's work is motivated by the desire to "secure firm ground for Christian religion, ground that could stand up to the increasing historical, philosophical, and scientific criticism [of Christianity] in the age of Enlightenment."⁴⁸ Aware that dogmatic theology had become untenable in the age of rationalism, his solution was to acknowledge that parts of the Bible were historical, while still retaining the idea of a true, unchanging, and divinely inspired religion. In his main work, *Abhandlung von freier Untersuchung des Canon* (4 vols., 1771–75),⁴⁹ he demonstrated "the contingent and historically conditioned nature of the canon and the significant difference between the Biblical books, which were [henceforth] to be considered as historical sources."⁵⁰ However, "he did not surrender the revelation of God thereby: rooted in the salvific event brought about by the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, it [i.e., the idea of revelation] is attested to clearly [and] solely in the holy scripture that has become historically manifest, the primordial human testament of God's word, and [it] serves as a 'moral,' that is, as an ethical-religious instruction of man concerning the path to salvation. . . ."⁵¹ In contrast, the remainder of the Bible, for Semler, mainly represented an "accommodation" (*Akkomodation*) to the listener's historical circumstances and intellectual horizons. How does Semler justify this separation of revelation from history?

In the main, he sets out to demonstrate a contrast between "the 'true Christian' content of New Testament doctrine from its Old Testament-Jewish garb."⁵² Thus, whereas orthodoxy taught that the Bible and dogma were absolute, "Semler taught that one must understand everything out of its time."⁵³ "The content of the Biblical books is to be 'localized' and 'temporalized,' that is, explained out of its geographic and temporal conditions, freed from these local and temporal components, and thus to be used in its moral content for the moral betterment of humanity. With this, Semler created the [method of] historical-critical exegesis [characteristic] of Enlightenment theology."⁵⁴

47. Historically, Semler belongs among the group of *Neologen* associated with the *Neologie* or *Neue Lehre* (new doctrine or new theology) who sought to mediate between the rationalism of the Enlightenment and Protestant theology. The *Neologen* were opposed, on the one hand, to orthodoxy but also, on the other, to the radical Enlightenment and to the critical rationalism of Kant. Caught between the orthodox camp and the modernizers, the Enlightenment theologians, as they were known, were successful in stemming the tide of rationalism for a while (even representing the consensus view for a time), before ultimately being overtaken in turn by history.

48. Werner Raupp, "Semler, Johann Salomo," in *Biographisches-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexicon*, vol. 14 (Herzberg: Verlag Traugott Bautz, 1998), 1445.

49. J. S. Semler, *Abhandlung von freier Untersuchung des Canon*, 4 vols. (Halle: Carl Hermann Hemmerde, 1771–75).

50. Raupp, "Semler, Johann Salomo," 1445–446.

51. *Ibid.*, 1446.

52. *Ibid.*

53. Paul Tschackert, "Semler, Johann Salomo," in *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, vol. 33 (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1891), 698.

54. *Ibid.*

It is not necessary here to enter into the further details of Semler's work, but we note some important points regarding the historical-critical method that has been his most enduring contribution to textual studies. To begin with, Semler's main interest was not the "problem of historical development as such"⁵⁵; indeed, contrary to its name, the historical-critical method was a reaction to the forces of historicism, which it sought to accommodate alongside its theological commitments. Semler's main concern was an "explicitly theological and simultaneously Enlightenment-pedagogical [aufklärerisch pädagogische] question: what are the contents of the individual Biblical texts, and how far can reading them spiritually edify the contemporary reader of the Bible...?"⁵⁶ Semler considered this question to be the "final purpose and the consequence" of all "properly founded and rational religions" and hence "even more of the Christian [religion] (Canon I, 9/hg. Scheible, 18)."⁵⁷ For Semler, this "aufklärerisch pädagogische" impetus, as Reventlow calls it, has as its goal the purification of Christianity itself in the name of "rational religion." Writes Semler:

I will not permit myself to enter into a quarrel, for I have used the words "rational religion"; I know what one commonly says and can say, but I mean it in the honest, innocent sense that Paul could address with λογικε ιατρεια. It is surely quite certain that even within Christian religion, as it has been accepted and applied by people, much that is irrational and incorrect has taken place: all this I wish to exclude through this rider.⁵⁸

Confronted with the dual challenges of defending faith against the radical Enlightenment, on the one hand, and of rescuing Protestant theology from orthodoxy, on the other, the historical-critical method presented an opportunity to combine the insight into the historicity of existence with the need for a transhistorical truth. It allowed for the creation of a religion that, at least according to its self-understanding, was rational (and hence, ahead of other religions).⁵⁹ Practically, this meant sacrificing a section of the Bible (mainly the Old Testament and especially the books Ruth, Esther, Ezra, Nehemiah, and all the narratives concerning the history of the Israelites). Of the Book of Esther, Semler says that it recounts "only insignificant, purely Israeli, local occurrences"⁶⁰ and hence "for those readers who

55. Henning Graf Reventlow, "Die biblischen Schriften aus ihrer Zeit heraus begreifen: Johann Salomo Semler," in *Epochen der Bibelauslegung*, vol. 4: *Von der Aufklärung bis zum 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2001), 182.

56. Ibid.

57. Ibid. (for the source of the quotation, see the next note).

58. J. S. Semler, *Abhandlung von freier Untersuchung des Canon nebst Antwort auf die tübingsche Vertheidigung der Apocalypsis*, vol. 1 (Halle: Carl Hermann Hemmerde, 1771), 9 (emphasis in original; quotation marks are the authors' addition).

59. This is a facet of the Protestant-German self-understanding we shall encounter again and again in German Orientalism. The Indologists' claim to being more objective than the commentarial tradition is ultimately based on this consciousness of being ahead on the evolutionary scale, of having undergone a Reformation and Enlightenment that non-Western cultures are *yet to undergo*.

60. Ibid., 34–35.

have not neglected their capabilities under the Jews, these books can be called perfectly useless as regards their betterment.”⁶¹ This also holds for all other events of Israeli history: these are, says Semler, “common human events [Veränderungen].”⁶² As Reventlow notes, “The entire domain of historical events is thus denied every salvific quality. Further, as they are special events of Jewish history, they are without significance for the members of other nations [Völker].”⁶³ “Is it a correct conclusion,” Semler asks, “that because the Jews consider these books to be *divine holy books*, hence all other peoples [Völker] must consider this content divine and much more honorable than the narration of the history and special occurrences of other peoples [Völkern]?”⁶⁴ The “main objection,” as Reventlow notes, is that “Jewish history (the history of Israel) is a *particular* history, which [thus] cannot have any significance for humanity as a whole, since it contains no *universal* truths.”⁶⁵ Once one surrenders the dogmatic claims to universal validity, the only means left of considering these works is the historical-critical perspective. The interpreter’s task becomes one of explaining the contents of the texts out of their specific historical—that is, geographic, social, and temporal—situation and, in so doing, of arriving at a “historically more nuanced evaluation of the Bible.”⁶⁶

Likewise, the second of the two great names associated with the historical-critical method, Ferdinand Christian Bauer,⁶⁷ relied on a dogmatic distinction between a Judaic-Petrine and a Christian-Pauline faction within early Christianity to set the dialectic in motion. Semler had used the distinction to drive a wedge between the Old and the New Testaments (and between the allegedly Judaic and Pauline sections of the New Testament as well) with the express intent of rescuing Protestant theology. Bauer now sought to establish this distinction as historical fact through his historical-critical researches into the Bible. Thus, in his 1831 article “Die Christuspartie in der korinthischen Gemeinde, der Gegensatz des petrinischen und paulinischen Christenthums in der ältesten Kirche, der Apostel Petrus in Rom,” he identified

two completely opposed systems that emerged from the contrast between Judaism and Pauline Christianity. According to the one system, revelation is only the general disclosure of what is already present that comes about with time, and all instruction of what has been divinely revealed occurs only via extrinsic teaching; according to the other system, revelation is a *καινή κτίσις* [new creation] that must

61. Ibid., 37.

62. Ibid., 24.

63. Reventlow, “Die biblischen Schriften aus ihrer Zeit heraus begreifen,” 184.

64. Semler, *Abhandlung*, 24.

65. Reventlow, “Die biblischen Schriften aus ihrer Zeit heraus begreifen,” 184.

66. Ibid., 189.

67. Indeed, the first recorded occurrence of the term that has since become the standard designation for the method can be found in Bauer’s “Über Zweck und Veranlassung des Römerbriefs und die damit zusammenhängenden Verhältnisse der römischen Gemeinde: Eine historische-kritische Untersuchung,” *Tübinger Zeitschrift für Theologie* 8, no. 3 (1836): 59–178. Bauer is also the first to coin the term *Tendenzkritik* to describe the critic’s task of grasping the immanent intention of the authors of the New Testament.

be understood in the depths of one's own consciousness as a higher life-principle that has been imparted through the divine Spirit; here Christ is only the teacher, there he is the savior in the highest sense; here all religious value is accorded to legal dealings, there to faith in the death of the savior.⁶⁸

Bauer also adopts Semler's idea of perfectibility (*Perfektibilitätsgedanke*), according to which history proceeds from lower forms of religion to higher. "The relationship of Christianity to heathenism and Judaism," he writes, "can only be determined as that of absolute religion to the forms of religion that preceded and are inferior to it. It is the advance from serfdom to freedom, from immaturity to maturity, from the youth of humanity to a period of adult ripeness, from the flesh to the spirit. . . . In Christianity, man knows himself for the first time to be elevated into the element of the Spirit and of spiritual life, his relationship to God is now the relationship of Spirit to Spirit."⁶⁹ Apart from its polemical significance vis-à-vis heathenism and Judaism, however, one of the most important consequences of Bauer's teleological conception of intellectual history was that it laid the intellectual foundation for a reflexive historical-critical examination of the documents of the past. The modern historical critic rather than the tradition was now established as the sole authority on the text. In fact, he became a kind of religious functionary entrusted with the task of mediating between the text and the present: historicizing the text had interrupted its ability to say anything to the reader, requiring the creation of a specialized corps of interpreters capable of *translating* it back into the present.⁷⁰ As Semler's biographer notes, "Even if the task that results from this [starting point] for the interpreter is to understand the content of the concerned writings locally and temporally, the historical-critical Enlightenment scholar [historisch-kritische Aufklärer] nonetheless succeeds in transforming the content written for the reader of that era into our way of thinking and our representations and thus in presenting the very same New Testament previously criticized from a theoretical perspective as unnecessary now as not merely the first but also the unchanging source of Christian faith."⁷¹ At the price of a pseudocritical concession to the historical spirit of the age, Enlightenment theology ends up granting the critic absolute freedom to determine what is essential and salvifically relevant in the text.⁷²

68. F. C. Bauer, "Die Christuspartei in der korinthischen Gemeinde, der Gegensatz des petrinischen und paulinischen Christenthums in der ältesten Kirche, der Apostel Petrus in Rom," *Tübinger Zeitschrift für Theologie* 3, no. 4 (1831): 134–36.

69. F. C. Bauer, *Paulus, der Apostel Jesu Christi: Sein Leben und Wirken, seine Briefe und seine Lehre. Ein Beitrag zu einer kritischen Geschichte des Urchristenthums. Zweite Auflage, nach den Tode des Verfassers besorgt von Dr. Eduard Zeller*, part 2 (Leipzig: Fues's Verlag, 1867), 232.

70. Husserl will later call (European) philosophers the "functionaries of mankind" (*Beamten der Menschheit*), showing how completely this Erastian conception of religion has been internalized within Germany philosophy by the twentieth century.

71. Tschackert, "Semler, Johann Salomo," 701–2.

72. This is a central part of our argument, which we will develop in the following chapters. The modern critic's genealogy is theological, and even when he pretends to have no theological commitments, he is actually the spiritual and political successor to the Catholic chaplain (of course, now with an added civilizational, purificatory zeal). Nowhere is this more apparent than in the history of Mahābhārata criticism, which is why this work has

The further history of the method, which was later adopted by Schleiermacher, is unimportant for us here. What is important to note is that the origins of the historical-critical method are theological, both in the trivial and nontrivial senses. The historical-critical method had been developed by J. S. Semler and applied by G. L. Bauer to the study of the Old Testament and by F. C. Bauer to the study of the New Testament. It progressively replaced the Protestant hermeneutic principle of *scriptura sacra est verbum dei* (The Holy Bible is the Word of God) with the principle *scriptura sacra continet verbum dei* (The Holy Bible contains the Word of God). Coupled with this new interpretive tendency, there was a new urgency regarding the need to look past the literal sense of the text (the so-called *sensus literalis*, which earlier Protestant theologians had held to be the true sense of scripture) at the historical realities (the *realia*) behind the text. Semler held that only the historical-critical method was capable of retrieving the meaning of the text via a critical, scientific inquiry. Even though scholars from F. C. Bauer onward progressively set aside Semler's concerns with private religion and progressively transformed the method into a free-standing literary enterprise, this did not diminish any of its theological significance. The growing secularization of the theological method was but the reverse side of a growing sacralization of literary studies themselves, while the absolute authority the method claimed for itself remains an uneasy reminder of its theological origins.⁷³

It is thus one of the ironies of history that a method that was to become such a core component of the methodological self-understanding of the textual sciences (*Textwissenschaften*) within the university not only had a theological origin but also was essentially theological: in spite of the name *historical-critical method*, what Semler was interested in was not history, but to identify that part of scripture that could be considered the pure Word of God.⁷⁴

In fact, since the separation and absolutization of the Word went along with a concomitant relativization of other aspects of scripture (parts felt to be Judaic) or other people's scripture (the Old Testament as a whole), the method was not only theological but also *religious*. The entire critical enterprise was undertaken not to defend and legitimate reason, but to rescue a kernel of dogmatic truth. Further, because the method was essentially dialectical in nature, it had to assume a minimum of *two* redactional agencies or ideologies in the text.⁷⁵

been chosen as the central text for evaluating the actual praxis of Indologists, as opposed to their self-understanding.

73. This claim has recently also been made by Michael W. Kaufmann in his "The Religious, the Secular, and Literary Studies: Rethinking the Secularization Narrative in Histories of the Profession," *New Literary History* 38, no. 4 (2007): 607–28.

74. McGetchin points out (personal communication) that freeing oneself from religion is now considered "the miracle," an observation that should place much of contemporary scholarship in a new light. We make a similar claim in chapter 4, when we discuss Rudolf von Roth and his conception of an "Allgemeine Religionsgeschichte" (universal history of religions).

75. In the case of the Mahābhārata, this requirement would be satisfied by positing an Āryan-Hindu or a Kṣatriya-Brāhmaṇa distinction. The practitioners of this method today (above all, James L. Fitzgerald and Kevin McGrath) do not even realize that their so-called critical researches into the text are determined a priori by the requirements of the method.

It did not matter whether these were called the New Testament–Old Testament–Jewish aspects of the text (Semler) or identified with the Judaic–Petrine and Christian–Pauline factions within early Christianity (Bauer): what was crucial was positing a difference in order to observe it (in the form of “scientific” propositions), only to then recover the part one had all along been interested in.⁷⁶

The method was critical only in the weak (Kantian) sense identified earlier that it entailed an affect against scriptural authority. The fact that it, in practice, was frequently used to separate out the Judaic element in scripture makes it ethically questionable, even though the method was thereby simply carrying forward the legacy of Luther’s Reformation. Finally, we need to note that, in the historical–critical method, the method determines the results rather than vice versa, so that the question of its applicability to texts is always moot.

And yet it is precisely this method, so deeply permeated with the spirit of eighteenth-century Protestantism and Enlightenment theology, that was ultimately to be definitive for the new nineteenth-century discipline of Indology. The enormous prestige of the new biblical criticism practiced by F. C. Bauer and the so-called Tübingen School and the influence of nineteenth-century historicism made it a foregone conclusion that this new discipline would adopt the spirit, if not the very method, of this new historical–critical era. In practice, the introduction of the historical–critical method was mediated via Orientalists such as Heinrich Ewald at Tübingen. In a letter to his colleagues in 1840, Ewald warned them “in Germany to pay much more attention to history than has been the case until now.”⁷⁷ According to Mangold, who cites the passage, this “impetus did not by any means echo unheard. Alongside the affirmation of philology, there were Orientalists even in the 1830s and 40s who were interested in historical themes and imbibed the critical method of the historians with its claim to a ‘systematic collection and critical examination of all sources.’”⁷⁸ Polaschegg notes that “in the wake of new concepts of translation that focused on the uniqueness of the source languages and tried to give it expression, Orientalist literature... began to manifest as a linguistic and literary *mode*.”⁷⁹ “Simultaneously, there was a transformation of the Orient, which transformed itself from a contemporary place, as it had been until then, to a historical space, and thus to one to which one could only gain access via making hermeneutic efforts.”⁸⁰

The text *must* have a history, because the method *demand*s a history: it is in *this* sense that this method can at all be called a historical–critical method.

76. The analogue in material physics would be a physicist with a spectrometer who said, “I can only use this spectrometer to analyze samples composed of at least two elements or impurities, but I cannot use it to analyze samples composed of a single pure element. And because I am incapable of detecting a pure element, the only elements that I can detect in your impure sample will be the two that you tell me are already in it.” Would one accept this as science?

77. Heinrich Ewald, “Schluss dieser Ausgabe der Zeitschrift,” *Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 3 (1840): 491.

78. Sabine Mangold, *Eine “weltbürgerliche Wissenschaft”: Die deutsche Orientalistik im 19. Jahrhundert* (Wiesbaden: Fritz Steiner Verlag, 2004), 104.

79. Andreas Polaschegg, *Der andere Orientalismus: Regeln deutsch-morgenländischer Imagination im 19. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2005), 278 (italics in original).

80. Ibid.

“Protestant theology, the sole science in Germany that traditionally had a cognitive interest in the Orient, held the methodical tools ready for such an understanding access to the Orient. Facilitated by the differentiation of historical and systematic research *within* Protestant theology, a field arose of a historical-critical Oriental science that institutionalized itself around the middle of the nineteenth century as an independent, yet still historical-critical discipline.”⁸¹

The trajectory traced by Oriental science from theological beginnings to an independent yet still historical-critical discipline is the very one traced by Indology, with perhaps one exception. Whereas the boundaries between Oriental science and theology (especially Old Testament theology), conditioned by the nature of their subject, remained fluid, Indology was able, at least officially, to distance itself from theology even as it borrowed both tools (the historical-critical method) and agendas (a continuation of its anticlerical, anti-authoritarian stance) from the latter. For this reason, the history told here will largely take the form of interrogating the statements of German Indologists to see where and in what form this theological inheritance has, historically speaking, informed their concrete praxis.

DEFINING THE SCOPE OF INQUIRY

Although this book is intended as a history of German Indology, it naturally cannot claim to be exhaustive. German Indology is a huge and diverse field, extending from scholarship on the Vedic hymns, Upaniṣads, Dharmaśāstras, Purāṇas, and so on to treatises on systematic philosophy (*śaḍdarśana*), Indian drama, poetry, literature, and grammatical and scientific texts. It encompasses a number of technical aids such as dictionaries, grammar books, and catalogues of manuscripts. However, the scope of our inquiry was delimited by its double concern of presenting a history of German Indology from the perspective of its method and a history of its method from the perspective of its theological inheritance (the two, in the end, being one and the same). It would make no sense to castigate lower criticism work for its ideological perspective.⁸²

For this reason, it seemed most appropriate to focus on German interpretations of the Indian epic, the Mahābhārata, and of a portion of the epic, the Bhagavadgītā.⁸³ These texts played a crucial role in German intellectual circles beginning in the

81. Ibid. (*italics in original*).

82. This has been attempted by Peter van der Veer in his essay “Monumental Texts: The Critical Edition of India’s National Heritage,” in *Invoking the Past: The Uses of History in South Asia*, ed. Daud Ali (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 134–55, but with less than successful results. Lower criticism work must be criticized from a lower critical perspective, higher critical work from the perspective of revealing its underlying ideology.

83. The Mahābhārata is one of two Sanskrit epics, the other being the Rāmāyaṇa. Although we could also have expanded our focus to include the latter (many of the authors studied in this book also wrote on the Rāmāyaṇa; some, like the Bonn scholar Hermann Jacobi, also published entire books on it), there were two main reasons for limiting discussion only to the Mahābhārata. First, the Mahābhārata played a much more central role in the formation of German ideas of “critical” research. Even though German scholars applied similar sorts of prejudices to the study of the Rāmāyaṇa, on the whole the text was less productive for their ideology. Second, Rāmāyaṇa studies largely avoided the kind

nineteenth century.⁸⁴ To trace the story of the rise and fall of German Mahābhārata and Bhagavadgītā studies is thus simultaneously to track the fate of the discipline as a whole. Additionally, the availability of a critical edition of the epic allowed us to delimit the scope of inquiry further. By presenting a comprehensive overview of the textual tradition, the critical edition ruled out certain kinds of hypotheses (e.g., Āryan “Urepos,” original bardic narrative). Further, when studying the stemma created by Sukthankar for this text, as well as the critical edition text itself, we became aware of a dissonance between the text’s literary self-consciousness and its *Wirkungsgeschichte* and *Rezeptionsgeschichte*, on the one hand, and the interpretations of German writers on the epic, on the other. The text-historical method, which was repeatedly called “scientific” (*wissenschaftlich*), turned out to be far from a presuppositionless science. What historical processes were driving the ideology behind the articles of faith in higher criticism? A careful study of the genesis of Mahābhārata studies in Germany thus became necessary.

We also could have extended this analysis across space and time (covering, for example, the British and French reception of the text or extending the analysis back in time to cover the first phase of Oriental studies in Germany), but this would have diluted the focus of the book and, moreover, made it unwieldy. Further, our argument was specific to a subunit of Oriental studies in Europe. We were claiming that academic Indology, as it developed in Germany between the early nineteenth and twentieth centuries, had been influenced by a Protestant inheritance mediated via the historical-critical method. It would be a different matter altogether (and a different book) to study what kinds of prejudices were in play in British or French Sanskrit studies around the same time, and it would require similarly detailed textual research to make those claims.

Although our analysis focuses on the vicissitudes of this discipline as it developed in Germany, it is important to specify that by German Indology we do not, obviously, mean all Germans. We do not define German Indology by national or racial identity, any more than we mean that all German Indologists are alike. In fact, the second chapter of this work (on German Gītā interpretations) is concerned to demonstrate the tremendous latitude (deriving from personal predilections) between these interpretations. These differences, like the personal and political differences between individual Indologists, must be borne in mind. There were frequent disagreements about approaches, the correct interpretation of texts,

of problems that afflict Mahābhārata studies, largely due to the efforts of the scholars working on an English translation of the Rāmāyaṇa’s critical edition. Under the guidance of Robert P. Goldman and Sally J. Sutherland, the Rāmāyaṇa translation scholars evolved a balanced approach to the study of epic, combining textual reflections with literary, ethical, and epistemological concerns.

84. The Bhagavadgītā has been the paradigmatic text for the German reception of Indian thought, as scholars such as Figueira, Sharpe, and Herling have argued. Herling has presented a lucid account of the first phase of German reception (the period 1778 to 1831). The first three chapters of this book cover the period thereafter (i.e., 1837–1937), tracing the way the historicist and epic fantasies of Christian Lassen, Adolf Holtzmann Sr. and Adolf Holtzmann Jr. provided the impetus for a less philosophical preoccupation with Indian texts in academic Indology.

and reconstructions of the tradition. These disagreements were exacerbated by personal and political antagonisms and by the inevitable competition that must result between members of a small, isolated community. One would not, for instance, want to place a scholar such as Heinrich Lüders (forced to resign his professorship at the University of Berlin in 1935 by the National Socialists)⁸⁵ on the same level as Jakob Wilhelm Hauer⁸⁶ (National Socialist German Workers Party [NSDAP] member and founder of the Āryan Seminar at the University of Tübingen)⁸⁷ or Erich Frauwallner (NSDAP member and proponent of theories of racial superiority).⁸⁸ Nor ought one overlook the small but significant minority of Jewish scholars (among them, Walter Ruben, Richard Simon, and Otto Stein)⁸⁹ or women Indologists (Else Lüders, Betty Heimann) or the minority of German Indologists employed outside Germany (Georg Bühler, until 1880 at Elphinstone College, Bombay, and Franz Kielhorn, until 1881 at Deccan College, Pune).

What, then, do we mean by German Indology? As we use the term in this study, we have in mind primarily a *mode* of doing scholarship. Even though this mode originated in Germany, its application was international. For example, French, English, Dutch, and American scholars quickly assimilated the text-historical method.⁹⁰

85. See Pollock, "Deep Orientalism?" 95 and 122, n. 37.

86. Jakob Wilhelm Hauer was a founder the Āryan Seminar (das Arische Seminar) at the University of Tübingen and a member of the SS and SA. Interned after the war and found guilty of collaboration with the Nazis, Hauer was banned from teaching until 1950. On Hauer's life and work, see the recent book by Ša'ul Bauman, *Die Deutsche Glaubensbewegung und ihr Gründer Jakob Wilhelm Hauer (1881–1962)*, trans. Alma Lessing (Marburg: Diagonal Verlag, 2005). The older book by Margarete Dierks, *Jakob Wilhelm Hauer, 1881–1962: Leben, Werk, Wirkung: mit einer Personalbibliographie* (Heidelberg: Schneider, 1986), in contrast, is mostly inaccurate and highly partisan.

87. On the Āryan Seminar, see Horst Junginger, "Das 'Arische Seminar' der Universität Tübingen 1940–1945," in *Indienforschung im Zeitenwandel: Analysen und Dokumente zur Indologie und Religionswissenschaft in Tübingen*, ed. Heidrun Brückner, Klaus Butzenberger, Angelika Malinar, and Gabriele Zeller (Tübingen: Attempto Verlag, 2003), 177–207.

88. See his 1939 essay, "Der arische Anteil an der indischen Philosophie," *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 46 (1939): 267–91; and *Geschichte der indischen Philosophie*, vol. 1 (Salzburg: Otto Müller Verlag, 1953).

89. This rich and plural inheritance was, unfortunately, all but eliminated in the Second World War. It would be interesting to see if Indology made any efforts after the war to rehabilitate Jewish Indologists or to recruit new members to their ranks.

90. McGetchin (Douglas T. McGetchin, "Wilting Florists: The Turbulent Early Decades of the Société Asiatique, 1822–1860," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 64, no. 4 [2003]: 565–80) traces the decline of French Oriental studies in the period 1825–60 at least in part to debates over method triggered by the "Florist" controversy of 1825–29. (The controversy had been triggered by two articles published in the journal of the Société Asiatique by the young German scholar F. E. Schultz in 1825. Schultz criticized the Florists, scholars more interested in the literary qualities of translations, for their lack of philological accuracy. The clash of methods "almost tore the Société Asiatique apart and succeeded in setting Orientalist scholars in France on an exacting, scientific course," yet, as McGetchin notes, it also had "a serious unintended consequence: the adoption of this new agenda also inhibited the further growth of Oriental studies in France." *Ibid.*, 565). While there are a number of factors—cultural, political, and institutional—for the dominance of German Oriental studies by the mid-nineteenth century, there is little doubt that the perceived rigour of German scholarship vis-à-vis their European counterparts played a role in this rise.

The American Sanskritist Edward W. Hopkins studied in Berlin and Leipzig (between 1878 and 1881) and, on his return, introduced the method to America.⁹¹ (Before him, William Dwight Whitney had studied Oriental languages under Albrecht Weber in Berlin and under Rudolf von Roth in Tübingen from 1850–53 and later undertook a highly public campaign against Max Müller, whom he considered to be popular as against the rigour of German academics.⁹²) One could also characterize a number of other American Sanskritists (e.g., James L. Fitzgerald) who did not study in Germany as German Indologists. But although German Indology, in its practice, is international, *in its essential formulation and in its inception*, it remains German. For this reason, we are justified in speaking of German Indology. However, the reader must keep three things in mind at all times:

1. This epithet refers strictly and exclusively to an Indology based on the historical-critical method and following certain agendas that can best be understood out of German Protestantism.
2. This study takes a text-based approach, and its claims refer to a highly circumscribed group of texts and/or authors. Whether and in what way these claims can be extended to the work of other Indologists working in other fields (e.g., Vedas, Purāṇas) remains a subject for a separate study.
3. As German Indology is a broad term unifying various theoretical currents and approaches (e.g., *Indische Literatur*, *Indische Philologie*, *Indische Altertumskunde*, *Orientalische Philologie*, *Vergleichende Sprachwissenschaft*, *Sanskrit Philologie*, *Indogermanische Studien*), the analysis here refers more narrowly to that part of Indology identified with a certain tradition of Indian historiography that followed specific ideological and fundamentalist agendas in its historiography of India.⁹³

91. See Franklin Edgerton, "Edward Washburn Hopkins, 1857–1932," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 52, no. 4 (1932): 311–15.

92. One of the reasons for Whitney's virulent attacks on Müller was the latter's relatively generous assessment of Indian commentators. In contrast, Whitney wished to inherit the mantle of German scholarship and thus joined scholars such as Albrecht Weber and Rudolf von Roth in their polemics against the tradition. Although disdain for traditional scholarship was commonplace among European scholars, there was variation between individual schools with some Indologists being more open to Indian knowledge. Whitney, resentful of Müller's success, found that Müller's more positive evaluation of Indian thought offered him a weak spot to target. See Douglas T. McGetchin, "The Whitney-Müller Conflict and Indo-German Connections," in *Mapping Channels Between Ganges and Rhein: German-Indian Cross-Cultural Relations*, ed. Jörg Esleben, Christina Kraenzle and Sukanya Kulkarni (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), 29–50, see esp. 46–48.

93. The term *historio-graphy* is Gerdmar's, who clarifies it thus: "History, then, is much less an attempt to interpret historical empirical data of *wie es eigentlich gewesen*, than an ideological construct that expresses the author's overall view on Jews and Judaism in relation to early Christianity, by telling the story in a certain way. I therefore consciously use the term *historio-graphy*, to stress that the writing of history is the writing of a story that is an expression of the author's viewpoints, as much as it is a mere description of the object described." Anders Gerdmar, *Roots of Theological Anti-Semitism: German Biblical Interpretation and the Jews, from Herder and Semler to Kittel and Bultmann* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2009), 10–11. It is in this sense that we adopt and use the term.

We shall therefore focus mainly on the Tübingen and Bonn schools of Indology. The former, via the tradition of the Tübingen School of F. C. Bauer, David Friedrich Strauss, and other evangelical theologians, has been most interested in prosecuting religious goals in the name of a scientific study of India.⁹⁴ The latter, via the work of Christian Lassen, amateur historian and anthropologist of race,⁹⁵ has been most

94. Beginning with the Veda scholar Rudolf von Roth, who dedicated himself to the study of the Vedas, there has been a tradition at Tübingen of focusing on literature that can be assigned broadly to the category of “scripture.” Roth’s own teacher was the prominent evangelical theologian Heinrich Ewald. Ewald defended a view of continual development in the history of religions, with Christianity representing the highest stage of the evolution of man’s moral and spiritual being (see esp. his seven-volume work, *Geschichte des Volkes Israel bis Christus* [History of Israel, 1843–59]; esp. vol. 1, 9; and vol. 7, 394). As *Stiftsinspektor* (i.e., a member of the supervisory committee of the Evangelical Seminar), Roth was also actively involved in the development of theological studies at Tübingen. His student Richard Garbe set forth the theological focus of Tübingen Indology, as did Garbe’s student, the Nazi Indologist J. W. Hauer, who actively promoted a primordial Germanic religiosity through his organization, *Deutsche Glaubensbewegung*. The Tübingen focus on religion is continued today by Heinrich von Stietencron, who suggests discarding the term *Hinduism* altogether as part of a project of “rediscovering and accepting Hindu religious plurality.” Heinrich von Stietencron, “Religious Configurations in Pre-Muslim India and the Modern Concept of Hinduism,” in *Hindu Myth, Hindu History: Religion, Art, and Politics* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2005), 289. For Stietencron, the notion of a single Hindu identity is itself an element of a “drive for . . . power politics”; it is guided “by a missionary conception of one ‘Hinduism’” and hence made it “possible to claim for ‘Hinduism’ an overwhelming majority among the religions existing in India simply by ignoring, in the statistics, the existing religious differentiation between Vaiṣṇavas, Śaivas, Śāktas, tribal religions, Gāṇapatyas, etc.” Ibid. Stietencron has been recently criticized by Nicholson for using, or rather, perverting scholarship in pursuit of interventionist agendas; see Andrew J. Nicholson, *Unifying Hinduism: Philosophy and Identity in Indian Intellectual History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 201. Contemporary practitioners of the Tübingen School include Angelika Malinar and Peter Schreiner; both are primarily concerned with religious topics.

95. Lassen’s dissertation, titled *Pentapotamia indica: Commentatio geographica atque historica* (Bonn: Weber, 1827), undertook a geographical and historical investigation into the Panjab, based mainly on the accounts of ancient travelers and of ancient texts such as the Mahābhārata. Although written under the guidance of A. W. Schlegel, Lassen was uninterested in philosophical or literary questions. Much of the work focuses on deducing geographical facts from the similarity of place names in Greek and Sanskrit (see the review of the work in *Jenaische Allgemeine Literaturzeitung* 193 [1828]: 97–101). Lassen also set forth this pseudohistorical approach in numerous later works, especially his monumental *Indische Alterthumskunde* (first volume published 1847 [first half 1843; rev. ed. 1867 (first half 1866)], second volume 1852 [first half 1849; rev. ed. 1873], third volume 1858 [first half 1857], fourth volume 1861, appendices 1862). Contemporary accounts of Lassen tend to the hagiographic and rarely mention his interest in race; see, for example, Horst Albach, “Der Indologe Christian Lassen,” in *Orden Pour le Mérite für Wissenschaften und Kunst. Reden und Gedenkworte*, vol. 36: 2007–2008 (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2007), 109–13; and the even more bombastic comments by Klaus Karttunen in “Christian Lassen (1800–1876): A Neglected Pioneer of Indology,” in *Expanding and Merging Horizons: Contributions to South Asian and Cross-Cultural Studies in Commemoration of Wilhelm Halbfass*, ed. Karin Preisendanz (Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences, 2007), 109–19.

interested in historical investigations, whereby one must keep in mind that the histories these scholars came up with rarely existed outside their own minds.⁹⁶

Since it is this combination of religious, evangelical concerns with (pseudo)historical methodology that became definitive for the discipline known as German Indology, this book focuses mainly on what might be termed a Tübingen-Bonn axis. This is not to say that this approach was employed *only* in Tübingen and Bonn. On the contrary, it was adopted all over Germany.⁹⁷

However, since the methodological approach we are interested in querying first emerges from the crossing of the religious-historical (*religionsgeschichtlich*) perspective of Tübingen Indology (Richard von Roth, Richard Garbe, Heinrich von Stietencron) with the historical reconstructions of the Bonn school (Christian Lassen, Willibald Kirfel, Paul Hacker), we shall attune our inquiry to two sets of questions:

1. What were the religious agendas German Indologists were pursuing, what was the religious context that shaped them in their formative years, and what role did an outwardly secularized conception of religion, namely, in the form of the “study of religions” (*Religionswissenschaft*) or the “history of religions” (*Religionsgeschichte*), play in their work?
2. What was the understanding of history these Indologists were operating with, how did historical topics go proxy for religious goals, and in what way did the positing of an outwardly secularized historical science as the end goal and culmination of human intellectual development itself contribute to the creation of a teleological narrative of history?

Finally, one might also ask: why only Germans? Why not, for example, the English? Extending this logic, one could generalize away the problems of Mahābhārata scholarship as one of inevitable misunderstandings that complicate any intercultural encounter. These issues have been dealt with admirably by Figueira and in the literature following her pathbreaking work.⁹⁸ But this study is precisely *not* adding to the already prodigious literature on European Orientalism. Rather, it concretely studies inceptive and enduring interpretations of the Indian epic from two perspectives: a historical perspective and an epistemological perspective.

96. This view is shared by Madeleine Biardeau; see her *Hinduism: The Anthropology of a Civilization*, trans. Richard Nice (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), esp. 4–6.

97. Other approaches were in play, such as the comparative linguistics of Franz Bopp (1791–1867), and these approaches too made a grab for the popular imagination as discussed by McGetchin in his chapter “Reaching the Public” (chapter 5 of *Indology, Indomania, and Orientalism*). But the *religionsgeschichtliche* method has dominated German studies on the epics, the Purāṇas, and the Bhagavadgītā. In terms of volume, these studies easily exceed the grammatical, linguistic, and lexical works produced by German scholars.

98. See her *Translating the Orient* and also her *The Exotic: A Decadent Quest*, both cited earlier.

Historically, the dominant principles that inform Mahābhārata study, especially as “scientific” and “critical,” were forged in Germany. The *Sitz im Leben* of early Mahābhārata criticism is not Europe in general, but among Germanophone scholars. The text-historical method itself arises historically out of a series of events that are first and foremost a part of German history. Further, certain theses regarding the Mahābhārata, such as the war narrative hypothesis, the Āryan hypothesis, and its correlate, the Brahmanic hypothesis, which have since become dogma within scholarship pertaining to this epic, were conceived and nurtured initially and for the most part by German Indologists in the German language. That these hypotheses were by no means compelling or even persuasive is shown by the work of the brilliant French scholar Madeleine Biardeau and her American counterpart, Alf Hiltebeitel. The reader ought to bear in mind that within Europe and in the United States, there are *other* approaches to the study of the epic that serve as contemporary counterexamples to German Indology as it pertains to Mahābhārata studies.⁹⁹

Epistemologically, at least since Foucault, we are aware of the hegemonic and normative dimensions of “science.” The term *Wissenschaft* occurs frequently in German Indology. What is the basis for this insistence on the rhetoric of scientificity? The text-historical method chooses a certain construction of history over every other understanding of truth. Thus, instead of asking whether something is true, we now ask, why did some people believe it to be true? Put simply, the truth of a thing is reduced to its history. Thus in evaluating the text-historical method as practiced by German Mahābhārata scholars, it would be inappropriate to apply some external veridical standard. This study therefore outlines the institution, hegemony, and diremption of the text-historical method. These larger questions concerning how truth is created and used guide this study; for this reason, we found it appropriate to relate it to other views of truth and textual hermeneutics, such as Gadamer, and other uses of texts, such as Gandhi.

PLAN OF STUDY

In chapter 1, we take a close look at some early interpretations of the Mahābhārata, including Christian Lassen’s “Beiträge zur Kunde des Indischen Altertums aus dem Mahābhārata,”¹⁰⁰ Adolf Holtzmann Sr.’s *Indische*

99. See, for instance, the studies by David Shulman, Frederick M. Smith, and Gregory M. Bailey cited in the bibliography. All of these studies have brought to light important facets of the Indian epic, using a variety of perspectives—literary, psychoanalytic, philosophical, sociocultural, and biographic. The Mahābhārata has also been usefully studied in conjunction with the Purāṇas, most notably by Madeleine Biardeau and Wendy Doniger. But these authors represent a minority view within contemporary Mahābhārata studies, which have largely followed the pseudocritical, racial approach pioneered by Christian Lassen and further developed by Adolf Holtzmann Jr. and Hermann Oldenberg.

100. Christian Lassen, “Beiträge zur Kunde des Indischen Altertums aus dem Mahābhārata I: Allgemeines über das Mahābhārata” and “Beiträge zur Kunde des Indischen Altertums aus dem Mahābhārata II: Die Altindischen Völker”; both in *Zeitschrift*

Sagen,¹⁰¹ and Adolf Holtzmann Jr.'s *Zur Geschichte und Kritik des Mahābhārata* and *Die neunzehn Bücher des Mahābhārata*.¹⁰² This inceptive chapter shows how concepts such as internal criticism (*innere Kritik*), tendency criticism (*Tendenzkritik*), and text history and redaction history (*Textgeschichte* and *Redaktionsgeschichte*) that originally developed in the context of biblical criticism were projected onto the Indian epic. Even though the original field of application of these concepts was Old Testament criticism, they were found useful in epic studies to separate out an "Urepos" (a primordial epic or an original epic) from the text as extant, a process that led to the postulation of two phases (stages or ideologies) in Indian history: an Āryan-Indo-Germanic phase and a Brahmanic-Hindu phase. These concepts had roughly the same heuristic value as the distinction between Petrine and Pauline factions in primal Christianity had for biblical criticism.

In chapter 2, we focus on the work of Adolf Holtzmann Jr. Although not the first to postulate an Indo-Germanic original epic at the root of the three epic traditions (i.e., Greek, German, and Indian),¹⁰³ Holtzmann is the first to develop the hypothesis of an Urepos into a comprehensive theory. In doing so, he simultaneously creates the image of the Āryans that is to be definitive for all future German scholarship: a heroic, warlike race capable of both violence and greatness. Holtzmann also makes use of a second distinction that is fundamental to German Bhagavadgītā scholarship: the distinction between the war narrative and the didactic episodes of the epic.¹⁰⁴

The dynamic between these two pairs of distinctions (Āryan versus Brahmanic, war epic versus philosophical-didactic) constitutes the historical backdrop against which German scholarship on the Gītā must be studied. Hence, understanding their historical origins and the ideological value attached to them is a crucial step in mapping the history of this scholarship.

für die Kunde des Morgenlandes (1837): 61–86 and 341–53. Part 2 was continued in *Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 2 (1839): 21–70 and 3 (1840): 183–217.

101. Adolf Holtzmann Sr., *Indische Sagen. Zweite verbesserte Ausgabe*, vol. 1 (Stuttgart: Verlag von Adolphe Krabbe, 1854).

102. Adolf Holtzmann Jr., *Zur Geschichte und Kritik des Mahābhārata* (Kiel: C. F. Haessler, 1892) and *Die neunzehn Bücher des Mahābhārata* (Kiel: C. F. Haessler, 1893).

103. The first was, in fact, his uncle Adolf Holtzmann Sr., whose book *Indische Sagen* we also discuss in this volume.

104. Although Holtzmann makes use of this distinction, he is not its inventor. It can be traced back to the work of Christian Lassen, who in his 1837 article had suggested that the original epic would have been expanded through the addition of didactic materials. Although the earliest references to a "Bhārata" as opposed to a "Mahā" or "Great" "Bhārata" may be found in Lassen's article, it is Goldstücker who gives the thesis its classic form, writing: "The groundwork of the poem, as mentioned before, is the great war between two rival families of the same kin; it occupies the contents of about 24,000 verses. This, however, was overlaid with episodical matter of the most heterogeneous kind..." Theodor Goldstücker, "Hindu Epic Poetry: The Mahābhārata," *The Westminster Review* n.s., 33 (1868): 388, reprinted in *Literary Remains of the Late Professor Goldstücker*, vol. 2 (London: W. H. Allen, 1879), 86–154. Goldstücker, however, was reviewing Lassen's work (*Indische Alterthumskunde*, vols. 1–4), which tells us something about how scholarly myths, once they start, can be continually reinforced. By the time Hopkins gives the thesis his imprimatur (in 1901 in his *The Great Epic of India: Its Character and Origin* [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901]) by introducing the terms "epic" and "pseudo-epic" to refer to the two parts, the thesis is a fundament of Western approaches to the Mahābhārata.

In chapter 3, we apply the hermeneutic perspectives gained in the previous chapter to a reading of six German Gītās.¹⁰⁵ This chapter covers (in sequence) the “pantheistic Gītā” of Adolf Holtzmann Jr., the “theistic Gītā” of Richard Garbe, the “epic Gītā” of Hermann Jacobi, the “Kṛṣṇa Gītā” of Hermann Oldenberg, the “trinitarian Gītā” of Rudolf Otto, and the “Āryan Gītā” of J. W. Hauer. To these six “Indological Gītās,” we also add a final one: the “Brahmanic Gītā” of Georg von Simson.¹⁰⁶

Each of these Gītās operates with the basic conceptual vocabulary provided by Holtzmann. By reconstructing their (often complex and mutually contradictory) analyses of the poem, we are able to track how German Gītā scholarship oscillates between the two poles of a heroic Āryan inheritance and its rationalistic Enlightenment-Protestant inheritance. For example, Holtzmann valorizes the “pantheistic” elements of the Bhagavadgītā as being more original than its “theistic elements.” He sees the former (founded on primitive nature worship) as the genuine inheritance of the Indo-Germanic tribes. The latter, in contrast, represents Brahmanic influence on the Gītā. He is opposed by Richard Garbe, who wishes to reclaim the Indo-Germanic heritage as being consonant with nineteenth-century Enlightenment Germany. The theistic elements are an original inheritance; the pantheistic elements, in contrast, reflect the Indian tendency to dissolve all differences in the idea of an all-encompassing unity. Since pantheism, following the

It will not be questioned thereafter until the mid-twentieth century (in the work of V. S. Sukthankar, editor of the Mahābhārata critical edition; see his *On the Meaning of the Mahābhārata* [Bombay: Asiatic Society, 1957]).

105. The expression “German Gītā” is, of course, borrowed from the title of Herling’s book. We use it as a shorthand to designate German Gītā scholarship, although as Herling’s book (and now our work) suggests, there is no essential “German Gītā,” but only a plurality of interpretations. In spite of this plurality, however, there is a common ideology underpinning these interpretations and it is *this* ideology we have in mind when we use the expression in the singular.

106. Other Gītās might have been considered. We could also have included the Gītās of F. Otto Schrader (“the oldest Gītā as part of the pre-Viṣṇuite Mahābhārata was at an end with II, 38... but was possibly expanded with a number of ślokas in the same tone, before the Bhāgavatas placed the actual ‘Bhagavadgītā’ on this small foundation, which [Bhagavadgītā] in the final stage, [now] recognized as part of the Mahābhārata, passed through the hands of a Vedāntic revisionist”; “Über Bhagavadgītā II, 46,” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 64 [1910]: 340) or of E. W. Hopkins (“This Divine Song... is at present a Krishnaita revision of an older Vishnuite poem, and this in turn was at first an unsectarian work, perhaps a late Upanishad”; Edward Washburn Hopkins, *The Religions of India* [Boston and London: Ginn & Company, 1895], 389) or of M. Winternitz (“I would like to believe that of the final songs of the Bhagavadgita only the twelve verses XVIII. 55–66 are genuine and old, and these most probably constituted the conclusion of the poem.... I therefore do not believe that Garbe is fully in the right when he eliminates the 170 verses that contain Vedic-Brahmanic and pantheistic doctrines, but rather, I would hazard that we ought to eliminate at least another 200 verses so that the old and genuine Bhagavadgītā was smaller by more than one half of its present extent”; Review of *Vier philosophische Texte des Mahābhārata*, by Paul Deussen and Otto Strauss, *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 21 [1907]: 197). The problem with these Gītās is that they are derivative: Schrader and Winternitz wish only to extend Garbe’s ideas and Hopkins mainly sets forth his ideas of the evolution of the Mahābhārata epic, ideas that, as we shall see, he owes to Holtzmann’s Mahābhārata.

Pantheismusstreit of the eighteenth century, had become socially unacceptable in Germany, Garbe rejects it. The lusty, blood-drinking Aryans valorized by Holtzmann now become good (proto-) Christians.

Chapter 3 concludes with an overview of these scholarly differences and debates. We argue that the German *Gītā* is constituted less by its content (which can vary enormously) than by certain presuppositions regarding the nature and function of scholarship. These may be summarized as:

1. A rejection of theology and philosophy.¹⁰⁷
2. Unbounded confidence in the historian's ability to recover an "original."
3. A rejection of Indian hermeneutics as "uncritical."
4. A claim to sovereignty over both text and tradition.

This fourfold characterization justifies us in our claim that German Indology constitutes less a national tradition than a certain *mode* of doing scholarship.¹⁰⁸ It is this mode that needs to be subjected to analysis from both historical and critical standpoints.

In chapter 4, we take up this task. We first subject the statements of contemporary Indologists to historical analysis. Thus, we trace the antecedents of their views in nineteenth-century isms: historicism, secularism, and scienticism (*Wissenschaftlichkeit*). Following Howard, we argue that these concepts represent valid, albeit terminologically problematic, attempts to characterize fundamental changes in European intellectual consciousness in the nineteenth century¹⁰⁹ but that their legacy in the humanities is more complex and ambiguous than appears at first. Further, in the case of Indology, these processes were ill understood and rarely reflected upon. Only in this way could the situation arise that a method originating in a reflex *against* rationalism could come to be mistaken for the ideal of enlightened, self-critical, and progressive scholarship. Indology today, we argue, especially in some of its more reactionary strains, still reflects this dogmatic inheritance. Thus, a clarification of Indology's method from a historical standpoint is an essential step on the way to a discussion of how the humanities can rethink their task after Indology.

Chapter 5 then subjects the statements of Indologists to critical analysis. Applying perspectives from Schürmann to Gadamer, we show how Indology became a progressively outmoded and isolated discipline. Even though contemporary scholars such as

107. There are important exceptions here, of course. Some, like Paul Deussen and Otto Strauss, took philosophy seriously. They even accepted and emphasized important elements of Indian theology. But this book focuses on the mainstream of German Indology, which was not open to these ideas. In fact, Deussen, for all his significance for German philosophy via his translation of the Upaniṣads, rarely plays a major role in German histories of the discipline. An alternative history could be written about the path German Indology *could* have taken, but this book is concerned only with the path it did in fact take.

108. However, the term should not be understood to mean that German Indology is merely a style, a historical phenomenon, one possible approach among others. There are serious ethical and epistemological implications to this way of approaching Indian texts, implications we clarify later in this book.

109. See Howard, *Religion and the Rise of Historicism*, 3.

Stietencron emphasize Indology's nature as a historicist science, they fail to see that just as historicism developed from the crisis of theology in the nineteenth century, hermeneutic phenomenology developed from the crisis of historicism in the twentieth. Thus, the very self-understanding of this discipline, as reflected in the statements of its theoreticians and defenders, is out of step with major developments in contemporary philosophy. Further, the positivism Indology subscribes to is an incomplete positivism: it takes the turn neither to a positivism dominated by social, emancipatory, and aesthetic concerns, as in Comte, nor to a critical positivism dominated by the rejection of a reality independent of the model-character of science, as in Mach, nor to a logical positivism dominated by the verification principle, as in Carnap.

The analysis of German Indology from both historical and critical perspectives sets the stage for an evaluation of the discipline in the conclusion. Here we focus both on wider problems in the humanities, especially as these have been articulated by thinkers such as Arendt and Adorno following the genocides of the Second World War, and on more specific problems relating to Indology. A brief section on Gandhi's interpretation of the *Gītā* concludes our argument that, in the humanities, scientific and methodological considerations are inseparable from ethical ones.

CHAPTER 1



The Search for an Urepos

Since every author . . . wishes to be understood, that is, that the same ideas as he himself had be stimulated in others, but this cannot be accomplished when multiple and varied ideas are associated with the same words, it follows that the meaning of the words of every writer, and hence also of holy scripture, cannot be other than the one we call the *historical* meaning. . . .

G. L. Bauer, *Entwurf einer Hermeneutik des Alten und Neuen Testaments*

INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the first phase of German Gītā scholarship—its enthusiastic reception in the work of Romantics and philosophers such as J. G. Herder, F. W. Schlegel, and Wilhelm von Humboldt—as a preliminary to our main concern: the Gītā’s reception (and reconstruction) in the work of the German Indologists Richard Garbe, Hermann Oldenberg, Hermann Jacobi, Rudolf Otto, Jakob Wilhelm Hauer, and Georg von Simson.¹ The bulk of the chapter, however, is dedicated not to the Gītā, but to the Indian epic, the Mahābhārata, of which the Gītā is a part. Our main aim in this chapter is to understand how, following the Bhagavadgītā’s disappearance from German intellectual consciousness through much of the nineteenth century, German Mahābhārata studies, especially the racial and historicist prejudices of its leading lights Christian Lassen, Adolf Holtzmann Sr., and Adolf Holtzmann Jr., laid the foundations for the Bhagavadgītā’s renewed reception in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.² Our main concern will be to trace the historical conditions that made it possible for the Gītā, following its disappearance in the wake of Hegel’s vociferous criticisms of Indian philosophy, to be reconstituted toward the end of the nineteenth century as an object of Indological research. This concern will simultaneously permit

1. This is discussed in the third chapter.

2. Lassen and Holtzmann Sr. are treated of in this chapter; Holtzmann Jr. is the subject of the next chapter.

us to define what we mean by German Indology more narrowly as a step toward our evaluation of its claims to scientificity in chapters 4 and 5.

THE FIRST PHASE OF GERMAN GĪTĀ RECEPTION

Even prior to the Indologists' reconstructions of the Bhagavadgītā that are the subject of this book, there had been a tradition of Gītā reception in Germany. The earliest translations of the Gītā emerged in the context of the Romantic fascination with the Orient. Johann Gottfried Herder, Friedrich Majer, Friedrich Wilhelm Schlegel, August Wilhelm Schlegel, as well as the philosopher-statesman Wilhelm von Humboldt had produced Gītā editions or Gītā translations and commentaries (table 1.1 shows the growth in German knowledge of the Gītā). In his *Zerstreute Blätter* of 1792, J. G. Herder included three collections of verses from the Bhagavadgītā under the heading of "Gedanken einiger Brahmanen" (Thoughts of some Brahmans).³ The collections included a total of eleven verses from chapters two and three of the Gītā and were individually titled "Die Verstorbenen" (The Dead, verses 2.11, 13, 14, and 15), "Dreifacher Zustand" (Threefold Condition, verse 2.27), and "Religion" (Religion, verses 3.10, 11, 12, 13, 14, and 16). Even though he explicitly described his collection as a series of "Nachdichtungen" (poetic renditions) and had, in fact, made a number of changes to the verses, these collections count as the earliest translations of the Gītā into German. Herder's poetic rendering was followed in 1802 by the first complete translation of the Gītā into German (albeit from the English edition of Charles Wilkins rather than from Sanskrit⁴) by his student, Friederich Majer.⁵ Majer's translation included an introduction in which he pointed out the affinities between the Gītā's doctrines and Platonic and Spinozistic philosophy. This tradition of philosophical appreciation was continued by F. Schlegel, who appended an excerpted translation of the Gītā to his 1808 study, *Die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier*.⁶ In a brief introduction to the poem, Schlegel noted that the poem was part of the epic, but

3. J. G. Herder, "Gedanken einiger Brahmanen," in Johann Gottfried Herder, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Bernhard Suphan, vol. 26: *Poetische Werke*, ed. Carl Redlich (Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1968), 408–10. Herder produced six collections of the *Zerstreute Blätter* in all (in 1785, 1786, 1787, 1792, 1793, and 1797), these are published under the title "Nachdichtungen aus der morgenländischen Litteratur" in his complete works. The verses from the Gītā are all in the fourth collection.

4. Charles Wilkins, *The Bhāgavat-Gêetâ, or Dialogues of Krêëshnâ and Ârjôôn* (London: C. Nourse, 1785).

5. Friedrich Majer, trans., "Der Bhaguat-Geeta, oder Gespräche zwischen Kreeshna und Arjoon," *Asiatisches Magazin* 1 (1802): 406–53 and 2 (1802): 105–32, 229–55, 273–93, 454–71, and 477–90.

6. Friedrich Schlegel, *Die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier* (Heidelberg: Mohr und Zimmer, 1808) (Schlegel's translation of the Gītā can be found from pp. 284–307). The complete text has been reprinted in *Kritische Friedrich Schlegel Ausgabe*, ed. Ernst Behler et al., vol. 8: *Studien zur Philosophie und Theologie*, ed. Ernst Behler and Ursula Struc-Oppenber (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1975). All references are to the 1975 edition.

Table 1.1 GROWTH IN GERMAN KNOWLEDGE OF THE BHAGAVADGĪTĀ

J. G. Herder (1792)	F. Majer (1802)	F. W. Schlegel (1808)	W. von Humboldt (1825 and 1826)	G. W. F Hegel (1827)
Poetic renditions	Complete (from English)	Selections	Individual verses within a commentary	Outline of poem, translation from secondary sources? ^a
—		1.20–35, 37–39, 45–47	—	Summary of chapter
2.11–15, 27		2.1–8, 11–38	2.12, 16–17, 26–30, 47–48, 58, 69–70	2.12, 18, 21, 26–27
3.10–14, 16		—	3.22–24	3.22
—		4.1–10	4.5–9, 13–14, 18, 35	—
—		5.3–4, 19–21, 23–25	—	—
—		6.10, 15, 18–22, 25–31	6.29–32	—
—		7.1–28	7.4–7, 11–12	—
—		8.15–16	8.13, 17–22	—
—		—	9.4, 6–8, 10, 19	9.16
—		—	10.39	—
—		—	11.7, 12–13, 16, 33–34, 36, 43	—
—		—	—	—
—		—	13.12, 26, 31–33	—
—		—	14.3–4	—
—		—	15.4b, 6, 7–9	—
—		—	—	—
—		—	—	—
—		—	18.46, 53b–55	—

^a Hegel includes translations of a few verses, but does not clarify the source. As he did not know Sanskrit, the verses are likely translations or paraphrases of existing translations, most probably of A. W. Schlegel (from Latin) or F. Schlegel or W. von Humboldt (from German).

argued that, “since the occasion for the war and the history of the war has no further influence on the understanding of the philosophical episode [i.e., the Gītā] from which we present some of the most important sections here, we shall overlook it.”⁷ This prejudice was also reflected in his translation of the Gītā’s first chapter. Schlegel left out the first nineteen verses of the chapter, which describe the muster for battle. He also left out verses forty to forty-four, which relate to the evils of violating *kuladharmā* (the duty to family). (Both aspects would be considered central by a later generation

7. Schlegel, *Die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier*, 393.

of Indologists.) Indeed, the introduction makes clear that, for him, the Gītā's central concern was not the legitimization of war or the maintenance of a code of heroic ethics, but the problem of death in general. Schlegel emphasized that Kṛṣṇa "consoles him [Arjuna] by explicating the doctrine of the unchanging eternal unity and the nonreality of all other manifestations"⁸ and saw an organic unity between the poem, thus begun or thus introduced, and the larger epic of which it is a part. "So begins the philosophical dialogue, which is the content of the famous episode of the Mohabharot [Mahābhārata], the *Bhogovotgita* [Bhagavadgītā], that is, the song of Bhogovan [Bhagavān]."⁹

Although Schlegel's translation was overshadowed by his conversion to Catholicism in the same year,¹⁰ his interest in the Gītā probably occasioned his brother A. W. Schlegel to produce his own edition as well as the first complete translation of the Sanskrit text,¹¹ albeit into Latin rather than German.¹² Schlegel's edition of the Gītā was not the first to appear in Germany,¹³ but it was responsible to a significant extent for popularizing the Bhagavadgītā in Germany. For example, it directly triggered Humboldt's essay defending Schlegel's translation

8. Ibid., 393.

9. Ibid.

10. Contemporaries such as Goethe and Heine, though they praised the quality of his translation, were scathing in their criticisms of his work. Both insinuated that *Die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier* had somehow been implicated in his decision to convert to Catholicism. To Heine, it seemed as though "the scent of frankincense streamed out of this book." Schlegel, he complained, "surveys the entire literature from an elevated standpoint, but this elevated standpoint is nonetheless the bell tower of a Catholic church. And in everything Schlegel says, one hears the church bells ringing; sometimes one even hears the croaking of the tower ravens, as they flutter around the tower." *Heinrich Heines Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 5, ed. Ernst Elster (Leipzig and Vienna: Bibliographisches Institut, 1893), 270–71. For a discussion, see Ursula Struc-Oppenberg, "Einleitung," in *Kritische Friedrich Schlegel Ausgabe*, ed. Ernst Behler et al., vol. 8: *Studien zur Philosophie und Theologie*, ed. Ernst Behler and Ursula Struc-Oppenberg (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1975), ccxxvii and ccxxviii.

11. August Wilhelm Schlegel, *Bhagavad-gita, d est Thespesion melos, sive, Almi Krishnae et Arjunae colloquium de rebus divinis, Bharateae episodum* (Bonn: E. Weber, 1823). Schlegel's edition was based on the Calcutta edition of 1809 and four Paris manuscripts and served as the *editio princeps* for a later generation of scholars in Germany. A second, revised edition was produced by his student Christian Lassen in 1846 (*Bhagavad-Gita, id est, Thespesion melos, sive, Almi Crischnae et Arjunae colloquium de rebus divinis* [Bonn: E. Weber, 1846]); Lassen prefaced his edition with an essay in Latin in which he discussed the history and reception of the first edition.

12. That honor would go to C. R. S. Peiper, who in 1834 finally produced the first complete translation of the Bhagavadgītā from Sanskrit into German: Carl Rudolph Samuel Peiper, *Bhagavad-Gita, das hohe Lied der Indus, aus der Sanskrit-Sprache metrisch und möglichst treu in's Deutsche übersetzt* (Leipzig: Friedrich Fleischer, 1834).

13. Before Schlegel, Othmar Frank had produced a partial edition (also with a Latin translation) under the title "Bhagavadgītāe: loca selecta cum versione" in his *Chrestomathia Sanskrita*, vol. 2 (Munich: printed by author, 1821). Frank included a translation of verses 1.40–45, 2.11–72, 3.1–43, 4.1–28, 30–42; after chapter 4, he reproduced only the Devanāgarī text of chapter 5–18, seemingly without omission; this section was titled "Bhagavadgītāe lectione V–XVIII." (According to Windisch, Frank originally produced a lithographic version of his chrestomathy in 1817 in one volume, before publishing it in two volumes in 1820 and 1821; see Windisch, *Geschichte Der Sanskrit-Philologie*, vol. 1, 64). Frank's edition never seems to have acquired the popularity Schlegel's did, perhaps because of its inferior type.

against Langlois' criticisms of it in his review in the French *Journal Asiatique*.¹⁴ Titled "Ueber die Bhagavad-Gîtâ. Mit Bezug auf die Beurtheilung der Schlegelschen Ausgabe im Pariser Asiatischen Journal," Humboldt's essay was sent to Schlegel on June 17, 1825 but was first published in Schlegel's *Indische Bibliothek* in 1826.¹⁵ Humboldt's enthusiasm for the Gîtâ is recorded in his publications over the next two years. On June 30, 1825 he presented a lecture on the poem at the Berlin Akademie der Wissenschaften under the title "Ueber die unter dem Namen Bhagavad-Gîtâ bekannte Episode des Mahâ-Bhârata," in which he described the poem as "a work rich in philosophical ideas."¹⁶ Almost exactly a year later, on June 15, 1826 he again lectured on the Gîtâ at the Berlin Akademie.¹⁷ This time he described the poem as "liv[ing] up, more than any other work of this kind, come down to us from any other nation, to the true and genuine concept of a philosophical poem."¹⁸ Humboldt also recorded his enthusiasm for the Gîtâ in a letter sent to Friedrich von Gentz in which he called it "the most profound and sublime [work] which the world has to offer."¹⁹ "My constant feeling when reading [this poem] is one of gratitude to destiny that it let me live long enough in order to become acquainted with this work."²⁰

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Gîtâ thus appeared set for a spectacular career in Germany. The greatest intellects of Weimar classicism had

14. A. S. Langlois, "Bhagavad Gîtâ id est thespeson melois... traduit par M. A. G. de Schlegel," *Journal Asiatique* 4 (1824): 105–16, 236–52.

15. Wilhelm von Humboldt, "Ueber die Bhagavad-Gîtâ. Mit Bezug auf die Beurtheilung der Schlegelschen Ausgabe im Pariser Asiatischen Journal. Aus einem Briefe von Herrn Staatsminister von Humboldt." *Indische Bibliothek* 2, no. 2 (1826): 218–58 and 2, no. 3 (1826): 328–72; reprinted in *Wilhelm von Humboldts Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 5: *Werke*, 1823–1826, ed. Albert Leitzmann (Berlin: B. Behr's Verlag, 1906), 158–89.

16. Wilhelm von Humboldt, "Ueber die unter dem Namen Bhagavad-Gîtâ bekannte Episode des Mahâ-Bhârata I," in *Wilhelm von Humboldts Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 5: *Werke*, 1823–1826, ed. Albert Leitzmann (Berlin: B. Behr's Verlag, 1906), 190, n. 1.

17. Both parts were published together in the *Abhandlungen der historisch-philologischen Klasse der königlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin* in 1828 (pp. 1–44 and 45–64) (but in the volume for the year 1825 and with a date of 1825) and then again as a separate volume in 1826, which is why one often finds confusing references to the date as being either 1825, or 1826, or 1828. All three of Humboldt's articles on the Gîtâ have been reprinted in *Wilhelm von Humboldts Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 5: *Werke*, 1823–1826, ed. Albert Leitzmann (Berlin: B. Behr's Verlag, 1906), 158–89, 190–232, and 325–44. (All references in this work are to the *Gesammelte Schriften*, but the 1826 book is widely available online.)

18. Wilhelm von Humboldt, "Ueber die unter dem Namen Bhagavad-Gîtâ bekannte Episode des Mahâ-Bhârata II," in *Wilhelm von Humboldts Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 5: *Werke*, 1823–1826, ed. Albert Leitzmann (Berlin: B. Behr's Verlag, 1906), 334.

19. Wilhelm von Humboldt, "Letter from 21 May 1827 to Friedrich von Gentz," in Friedrich von Gentz, *Schriften*, vol. 5: *Ungedruckte Denkschriften, Tagebücher und Briefe*, ed. Gustav Schlesier (Mannheim: Verlag von Heinrich Hoff, 1840), 291.

20. Wilhelm von Humboldt, "Letter from 1 March 1828 to Friedrich von Gentz," in Friedrich von Gentz, *Schriften*, vol. 5: *Ungedruckte Denkschriften, Tagebücher und Briefe*, ed. Gustav Schlesier (Mannheim: Verlag von Heinrich Hoff, 1840), 300. See also Wilhelm von Humboldt, "Letter from 21 June 1823 to A. W. Schlegel," in *Briefwechsel zwischen Wilhelm von Humboldt und August Wilhelm Schlegel*, ed. Albert Leitzmann (Halle a.S.: Max Niemeyer, 1906), 158.

appropriated the text and Wilhelm von Humboldt, architect of the Prussian educational system, had given it his official sanction. Yet 1826 marked the zenith of acclaim for the *Gītā* as celebrated by Humboldt, and its cultural influence would only decline thereafter. For with the publication of Hegel's review of Humboldt's *Gītā* article in 1827,²¹ a review in which, as Herling says, Hegel "shut[s] the door" on Indian thought,²² the *Gītā* entered a long period of eclipse in Germany.²³ Following the initial phase of the German preoccupation with the *Gītā*, when in the space of twenty nine years no less than four partial translations or editions and two complete translations (one also an edition) had appeared, the *Gītā* practically ceased to exist as an object of German literary and philosophical interest. Except for Lassen's 1846 edition (a revised version of Schlegel's 1823 edition), no philologist or philosopher would tackle the translation of the *Gītā* until Richard Garbe in 1905.²⁴ Indeed, the *Gītā* as an object of philosophical preoccupation would only reemerge in 1906 with the publication of Paul Deussen's translation and commentary,²⁵ followed in 1912 by Leopold von Schroeder's.²⁶ The tradition, however, would always remain tenuous: in the entire twentieth century, not a single German philosopher of the rank of von Humboldt would take up the *Gītā* for consideration. Even more striking is the fact that precisely at the moment that the *Gītā*, under the impulse of Hegel's attacks upon Indian philosophy, wandered off of the stage, it found a new home in the work of the theosophists, where it led a kind of half-life. Between 1827, the year Hegel published his criticism of Humboldt's *Gītā*, and 1905, the year Garbe finally reintroduced the *Gītā* to public consciousness, no less than seven translations or commentaries of the *Gītā* were published, almost all by those sympathetic to theosophic ideals.

21. G. W. F. Hegel, "Ueber die unter dem Nahmen Bhagavad-Gita bekannte Episode des Mahabharata; von Wilhelm von Humboldt," *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik* 7/8 (January 1827): 51–63 and 181–88 (October 1827): 1441–92; reprinted in Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 16: *Schriften und Entwürfe II (1826–1831)*, ed. Friedrich Hoegemann with the assistance of Christoph Jamme (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2001), 19–75. All citations refer to the 2001 reprint.

22. Herling, *The German Gītā*, 247.

23. Hegel's review is not considered here, because as Herling has noted, this review, at twice the length of Humboldt's original article, is strictly speaking not a review of Humboldt's *Gītā*, but a highly idiosyncratic engagement with Indian thought in the context of Hegel's own systematic philosophy. Hegel makes Humboldt's enthusiastic reception of the *Gītā* the pretext for an extensive critique of Indian thought, which had clearly begun to threaten his own system especially through Humboldt's suggestion of proximity between the *Gītā*'s ethics of *karma yoga* and a Protestant work ethic. The *Gītā* plays only a very marginal role in this critique.

24. Richard Garbe, *Die Bhagavadgītā. Aus dem Sanskrit übersetzt und mit einer Einleitung über ihre ursprüngliche Gestalt, ihre Lehren und ihr Alter versehen* (Leipzig: H. Haessel, 1905), 2nd revised ed. (Leipzig: H. Haessel, 1921). All citations refer to the 1921 edition, but are cited from the facsimile edition of 1988 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1988).

25. Paul Deussen and Otto Strauss, *Vier philosophische Texte aus dem Mahābhārata* (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1906). The translation of the Bhagavadgītā was later published separately by Deussen as *Der Gesang des Heiligen* (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1911).

26. Leopold von Schroeder, *Bhagavadgita. Des Erhabenen Sang* (Jena: Eugen Diederichs Verlag, 1912).

The concerns of this new group of *Gītā* commentators/translators were very different from those of an earlier generation. Although not mentioned by any of them, Hegel's review clearly cast a long shadow over their editions. Surprisingly, even authors who referred to Humboldt's essay on the *Gītā* avoided any discussion of Hegel's 1827 review (chart 1.1 shows the relationship of the different *Gītā* editions to each other). (Indeed Humboldt himself, though aware of Hegel's review, chose tactfully to ignore his criticisms.) Clearly, no scholar felt confident enough to go head to head with the official court philosopher of the Prussian state. Instead, the new generation of *Gītā* admirers sidestepped the question of the *Gītā*'s philosophical relevance by looking at it as a literary work—an expression of the sublime spirit of the Orient, and one that attested to the universality of certain human ideals. Thus C. R. S. Peiper, who published the first complete German translation (from Sanskrit) of the *Gītā* in 1834, saw in it “many beautiful and sublime and truly philosophical and religious thoughts” and argued that these “could serve as parallels to the doctrines of Christianity.”²⁷ Following in a long tradition of scholars to consider the Orient the home of human culture, Peiper argued for seeing “the philosophy contained in [the *Gītā*]” as “the original source from which the Chinese, Persians, Egyptians, Greeks, Romans and even in early and late ages the Germans drew [both] directly and indirectly.”²⁸ Peiper's successor, F. Lorinser wrote that “to his disconcertment and amazement” he had found “that the composer of the *Bhagavad-Gita* had not only been familiar with and frequently used the scriptures of the *New Testament*, but had also woven *Christian ideas and views* into his system.”²⁹ Describing the *Gītā* as “this widely admired monument of the ancient Indian spirit, this most beautiful and most sublime didactic poem, which can be considered as one of the most beautiful blossoms of heathen worldly wisdom,” Lorinser argued that the text nonetheless “owed its purest and most praised doctrines” to “a large extent” to Christianity.³⁰ Although he found “resemblances” to Christianity scattered throughout the poem, he argued that “the revelation of Krishna's divine form [i.e., the theophany of chapter 11]” in particular exhibited “an astonishing correspondence to the apotheosis of Christ on [Mount] Tabor.”³¹ In pursuit of this thesis of a Christian source to the *Gītā* (as well as in support of an evangelical agenda of the “glorification of the doctrine of Christianity, which alone is [truly] divine, even if it be at the price of a destruction of illusions about the value and the excellence of Indian wisdom”³²) Lorinser also appended a twenty-two page postscript to his translation in which he sought to demonstrate traces of Christian scriptures and ideas in the *Gītā*.³³ Robert Boxberger, the next to

27. Peiper, *Bhagavad-Gīta*, iii.

28. *Ibid.*, iv.

29. Franz Lorinser, *Die Bhagavad-Gita* (Breslau: G. P. Aderholz' Buchhandlung, 1869), v (Lorinser's emphasis).

30. *Ibid.*

31. *Ibid.*, vi.

32. *Ibid.*, x.

33. Franz Lorinser, “Anhang. Ueber die in der *Bhagavad-Gita* vorhandenen Spuren einer Benützung christlicher Spuren und Ideen,” in *Die Bhagavad-Gita* (Breslau: G. P. Aderholz' Buchhandlung, 1869), 267–89.

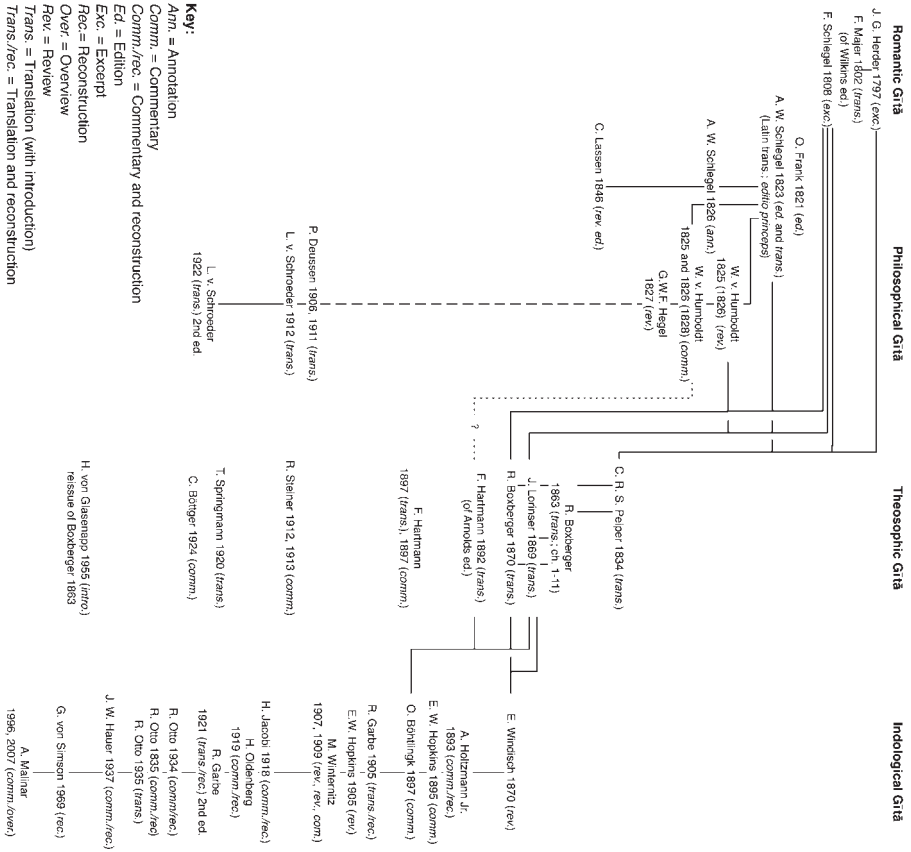


Chart 1.1 Types of German Gītā

Notes:

Herder's translation was a *Nachdichtung* (poetic recreation).

Frank's edition was only a partial one.

Peiper mentions a letter from W. v. Humboldt in Schlegel's *Indische Bibliothek*, but not his commentary or review.

Lorinser was also aware of Lassen's 1846 edition.

Bockberger was also aware of Lassen's 1846 edition.

Hartmann refers to W. v. Humboldt's letter to Lenz, but not his articles; it is however likely that he had read them.

Böhtlingk was also aware of Lassen's 1846 edition, which he incorrectly refers to as Schlegel's edition.

Stray remarks on the Bhagavadgītā are also to be found in Holtzmann 1892.

Garbe also produced numerous articles and encyclopedic entries on the Gītā; they are not listed here.

Malinar 2007 is a modified English translation of Malinar 1996.

consider in this list of theosophic Gītās, was more critical of the Gītā. According to him, Indian philosophy was the “morning dream of the philosophical spirit that is gradually awakening,”³⁴ but not as yet true (i.e., rational) philosophy. Citing Kuno Fischer, he argued that the Gītā was “not a philosophical system, not a work of reflective reason [räsønnirenden Verstandes], but a child of the poetic fantasy that does not grasp the divine but intuit[s] [it] in faith, that is to say, a philosophical poem in the truest sense of the world which was only possible at a stage when philosophy was still poetry [and] not a science so that in it [i.e., in the Gītā] neither could philosophy impede poetry nor could poetry impede philosophy.”³⁵ Although critical of the Gītā, Boxberger was nonetheless capable of acknowledging its charms. As he put it toward the end of his preface, “what is interesting about this poem . . . is not the specifically Indian [element] but the universal human [element]” and he concluded, “for me too, as I read the poem for the first time, it was as it was for Wilhelm von Humboldt, who wrote to Gentz that he thanks God for having permitted him to live so long so as to become acquainted with this poem.”³⁶ The final chapter in the theosophic Gītā before the rediscovery of the Gītā by the Indologists was penned by Franz Hartmann. An associate of Colonel Olcott’s and Mme. Blavatsky’s, Hartmann was the only one of the theosophic Gītā authors to be officially associated with the Theosophic Society.³⁷ In all, he wrote three books on the Gītā: *Die Erkenntnislehre der Bhagavad Gita im Lichte der Geheimlehre betrachtet* (a commentary or synthesis that attempted in six chapters to explain the salient points of the Gītā in light of the secret doctrine),³⁸ a poetic translation titled *Die Bhagavad Gita oder das Hohe Lied enthaltend der Lehre der Unsterblichkeit* (a translation of Edwin Arnold’s 1885 edition *The Song Celestial*³⁹),⁴⁰ and, finally, *Die Bhagavad Gita. Das Lied von der Gottheit oder die Lehre vom göttlichen Sein und von der Unsterblichkeit* (a prose version of his translation furnished with “explanatory comments and selected and appropriate citations from preeminent mystics”⁴¹). Couched in the language of mystical experience and of the awakening of the soul, Hartmann’s interpretation of the Gītā shows clear evidence of the influence of theosophic doctrines. Hartmann read the Gītā allegorically, as “describ[ing]the

34. Robert Boxberger, *Bhagavad-Gītā oder das Lied der Gottheit* (Berlin: Gustav Hempel, 1870), 6.

35. *Ibid.*, 8.

36. *Ibid.*, 12 (the reference is to the second of the two letters to Gentz cited earlier).

37. For a good account of Hartmann’s significance for the theosophic movement, see Helmut Zander, *Anthrosophie in Deutschland*, vol. 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2007) (with a brief biography on pp., 281–84).

38. Franz Hartmann, *Die Erkenntnislehre der Bhagavad Gita im Lichte der Geheimlehre betrachtet. Ein Beitrag zum Studium derselben* (Leipzig: W. Friedrich, 1897).

39. Edwin Arnold, *The Song Celestial or Bhagavad-Gītā* (London: Trübner, 1885).

40. Franz Hartmann, *Die Bhagavad Gita oder das Hohe Lied enthaltend der Lehre der Unsterblichkeit* (Leipzig: W. Friedrich, 1899), reprint: Munich: Schatzkammer Verlag, n.d. All citations refer to the reprint.

41. Franz Hartmann, *Die Bhagavad Gita. Das Lied von der Gottheit oder die Lehre vom göttlichen Sein und von der Unsterblichkeit* (Leipzig: Altmann, 1907) (the phrase is from the title page).

battle between the immortal and the mortal parts of the human and depict[ing] the triumph of the divine [element] over the animal [element] in man"⁴² and as propagating a science (Yoga) of "the union of man with God."⁴³

To be sure, we cannot always clearly isolate the theosophic *Gītā* from wider currents in German intellectual life. Peiper refers to the work of A. W. Schlegel, Franz Bopp, Othmar Frank, and Christian Lassen. Especially in the later editions (Hartmann is the notable exception) we find extensive references to the historical context of the poem. Lorinser included a twenty-five page historical introduction in his edition; Lassen's influence upon this introduction is unmistakable. And yet as a whole the concerns of this group of authors differs unmistakably from both the earlier generation of scholars (Herder, F. Schlegel, and von Humboldt) and from the later (R. Garbe, H. Oldenberg, H. Jacobi, et al.). First, the editions or translations of the *Gītā* to appear in this period (between 1827 and 1905) were produced exclusively by nonspecialists. In spite of their knowledge of Sanskrit and their considerable awareness of Sanskrit scholarship in Europe (Peiper cites the work of Antoine-Léonard de Chézy and William Jones; Lorinser of Émile-Louis Burnouf and John Cockburn Thomas; almost all scholars were aware of Wilkins) none of these scholars were able to stake a claim to a professorship in Indology. Second, although some scholars take a more historical perspective (e.g., Lorinser who sought to show the influence of Christian doctrines on certain doctrines of the *Gītā*), we nonetheless do not find the historicizing approach that becomes canonical in the wake of Holtzmann's historicist interpretation of the *Mahābhārata*. Hegel's review essay only interrupted the philosophical reception of the *Gītā* in Germany: it was not able to completely erase the poem's appeal. As Boxberger's comment about the *Gītā*'s universal significance illustrates, scholars were still interested in reading the *Gītā* from a philosophical perspective, although at the same time (and in the work of the same author) there was a conscious effort to avoid a head-to-head confrontation between the *Gītā* and contemporary Western philosophy. Boxberger clearly acknowledges that the poem belongs to a past stage of the spirit; Peiper thanks divine providence for permitting the spirit in Europe (through the Gospel) to advance much further than it had in India.⁴⁴ Although we cannot demonstrate the influence of Hegel here (as we noted, no scholar explicitly refers to his essay), it seems clear that these authors were in some way reacting to his philosophical views, but trying, nonetheless, to keep open a space for the *Gītā* in Germany. Thus, although historicism is looming on the horizon, the authors of the theosophic *Gītā* were still able to ward off the historical perspective (and its attendant danger, relativism). It was left to the authors of the Indological *Gītā* to take the fateful step that would finally derail the German experiment with the *Gītā*.

In spite of the efforts of Peiper and others, however, German interest in the Indian poem took a sharp downturn after 1827. Following Hegel's attacks on Indian

42. Hartmann, *Die Bhagavad Gita oder das Hohe Lied enthaltend der Lehre der Unsterblichkeit*, 6.

43. *Ibid.*, 7.

44. Peiper, *Bhagavad-Gita*, iii.

thought, the *Gītā* underwent a long period of eclipse in German intellectual life—an eclipse from which it was to only emerge toward the end of the nineteenth century, when the Romantic and philosophical *Gītā* of Herder, Schlegel, and von Humboldt was reconstituted as the Indological *Gītā* of Holtzmann, Garbe, and Jacobi. And when the *Gītā* finally reemerged as an object specialist preoccupation in the twentieth century, it was not as a philosophical work, but as a historical document. In this story, the names Christian Lassen, Adolf Holtzmann Jr., Edward Washburn Hopkins, and Hermann Oldenberg will have a major role to play.

THE BIRTH OF GERMAN MAHĀBHĀRATA STUDIES

The German reception of the Mahābhārata began with the translation of excerpts from the text. Besides the Bhagavadgītā, Schlegel also translated sections from the Śakuntalā narrative in his *Die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier* (1808) and Bopp included a translation of the Hiḍimba episode of the Ādiparvan (under the title “Der Kampf mit dem Riesen” or “the Battle with the Giant”) in his *Über das Conjugationssystem der Sanskritsprache* (1816).⁴⁵ Further episodes by Bopp followed: Arjuna’s journey to Indra’s heaven, Hiḍimba’s death, the Brahman’s lament, Sunḍa and Upasunḍa, an excerpt from Nala and Damayanti in 1824⁴⁶; the flood, Sāvitrī, the abduction of Draupadi, Arjuna’s return (from Indra’s heaven) in 1829⁴⁷; and the complete Nala and Damayanti in 1838.⁴⁸ All these works were prefaced by brief comments introducing the Mahābhārata.⁴⁹ However, Bopp’s works were mainly intended as anthologies (for reading practice) of Sanskrit literature; his introductions were not meant to be systematic contributions to the study of the epic.⁵⁰ The first systematic engagement with the epic was left to Christian Lassen in 1837 with the publication of the first part of his “Beiträge zur Kunde des Altindischen Alterthums aus dem Mahābhārata.”⁵¹ It is thus no exaggeration to call Lassen the founder of German Mahābhārata studies.

45. Franz Bopp, *Über das Conjugationssystem der Sanskritsprache in Vergleichung mit jenem der griechischen, lateinischen, persischen und germanischen Sprache* (Frankfurt a.M.: Andreätschen Buchhandlung, 1816), 239–69.

46. Franz Bopp, *Ardschuna’s Reise zu Indra’s Himmel, nebst anderen Episoden des Maha-Bharata* (Berlin: Königliche Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1824).

47. Franz Bopp, *Die Sündflut nebst drei anderen der wichtigsten Episoden des Mahā-Bhārata* (Berlin: Königliche Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1829).

48. Franz Bopp, *Nalas und Damajanti. Eine indische Dichtung* (Berlin: In der Nicolaischen Buchhandlung, 1838).

49. A twenty-three page “Vorrede” in the 1824 text, a twenty-five page “Einleitung” in the 1829 text, and a seven page “Vorwort” in the 1838 text.

50. In his 1824 text, for example, the actual translation was followed by copious notes and grammatical clarifications and then by the printed text of the Mahābhārata itself (in Devanāgarī). Bopp’s editions were thus intended as a contribution to the genre of “Sanskrit Chrestomathies” popular in Germany at the time.

51. Cited earlier in the introduction. This was the most significant part of the two-part essay, continued in volumes 2 and 3 of the journal. The remaining volume, however, are more interesting from the perspective of Lassen’s ethnographic/racial theories.

After Bopp there were a few more such exoticizing translations (Rückert's poetic translation of the Sāvitrī narrative in his *Brahmanische Erzählungen* of 1839 is a notable example⁵²), but on the whole the German reception of the Mahābhārata took a different direction after Lassen.

Christian Lassen was born in Bergen, Norway in 1800, but, after the death of his father in 1818, moved to Germany with his mother, where he was to remain for the rest of his life. After studying with A. W. Schlegel in Bonn (1821–24), he went to Paris and London for further studies, finally receiving his *venia legendi* from Bonn in 1827 (for a dissertation on the geography and history of ancient Panjab reconstructed mainly on the basis of travelers' tales and the Mahābhārata).⁵³ Further studies on the Mahābhārata followed in 1837, 1839, and 1840, followed by wider researches into ancient Indian history (although the Indian epic again played the central role) in 1843, 1847, 1849, 1852, 1857, 1858, and 1861. (Whatever else one could accuse Lassen of, it was not reticence in expressing his views.) In spite of his copious studies on the Mahābhārata, however, Lassen's work was not especially innovative: once laid down, his basic views on the epic remained unchanged for nearly a quarter century. Later studies amplified and provided additional "ethnographic" evidence for views he had already articulated in his 1837 article, but they did not in any way question or otherwise critically illuminate the basis for these views. Regardless, Lassen's pedantic, self-assured tone and the confidence with which he put forth speculative assertions about ancient India as established fact greatly impressed a generation of scholars. Albrecht Weber, Theodor Goldstücker, and Adolf Holtzmann Jr. all accepted his reconstructions of ancient Indian history and ethnography.

Lassen's central tenet in these reconstructions was that there had been two races in ancient India: the light-skinned Āryans invading from the north and the dark-skinned Dravidians native to the land.⁵⁴ Early on, the two groups fought for control of the subcontinent; in this conflict, the Āryans, being physically and militarily superior to the Dravidians, were able to subjugate the latter. Those of them

52. Friedrich Rückert, *Brahmanische Erzählungen* (Leipzig: C. Beyer, 1839). (Winternitz in his *Geschichte der indischen Literatur* has it as *Brahmanische Legenden* of 1836, but we have been unable to discover this title in any of the standard catalogues.)

53. Karttunen has it as "his Ph.D." (Karttunen, "Christian Lassen (1800–76)," 109), but this is incorrect: *Commentatio geogr. atque hist. de Pentapotamia Indica* was Lassen's *Habilitationsschrift* and he was thereafter conferred the title of Privatdozent (see Johannes Klatt, "Lassen, Christian," in *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, vol. 17 [Leipzig: Duncker und Humblot, 1883], 784).

54. Arvidsson credits Lassen, alongside Schlegel, with popularizing the terms *Arier* (Āryan) and *arische* (the adjectival form) in Germany; Stefan Arvidsson, *Aryan Idols: Indo-European Mythology as Ideology and Science*, trans. Sonia Wichmann (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 44. He also includes Lassen in a list of figures responsible for "chisel[ing] out" an "Indo-European" race, among them Joseph Arthur de Gobineau, Friedrich Max Müller, Adolphe Pictet, H. S. Chamberlain, Paul Broca, Karl Penka, and Hans F. K. Günther. There is little doubt that Lassen was one of the foremost theoreticians of race of the nineteenth century, responsible in large part for supplying the "historical" data that led to the creation of the "Aryan" race concept. This makes the present-day enthusiasm for him (see the entries for Albach, Karttunen, and Tsuchida in the bibliography) even more puzzling.

who did not flee into remote mountain areas (where they endured as the Ādivāsīs or tribals) were reduced to forming the lower castes of Indian society.⁵⁵ Lassen's main source for these assertions was the Mahābhārata, which he read as a record of this historical conflict in Indian prehistory. Although later overlaid with copious philosophical and didactic materials, according to him, in its core the epic still preserved the recollection of this primordial conflict.

Lassen also overlaid this central (racial) principle with a second one: possibly drawing on popular views of the Āryans as a warlike race, he assumed that the Mahābhārata had originally been the property of the warrior caste, the Kṣatriyas. Only in the course of centuries were the Brahmans able to take over the text, adding materials of a ritual and theosophic nature. Though not as rabidly anti-Brahmanic as later scholars, Lassen did impute a whole host of negative characteristics to the Brahmans.⁵⁶

Let us look more closely at Lassen's views of the epic, focusing on his 1837 article, which already contains in a nutshell all the views that are later repeated and expanded in his *Indische Alterthumskunde*.

Lassen's interest in the epic, from the very beginning, was historical.⁵⁷ As he wrote in the first part of his "Beiträge," "the publication of the entire *Mahābhārata* is an important event for the advancement of Indian studies; hereby one of the richest repositories for knowledge of the most ancient conditions of India has been opened to us. It [i.e., the Mahābhārata] towers over the *Rāmājana* as much in terms of the diversity and detail of its tidings about the ancient geographic and political circumstances of the land, about the traditions and customs of the inhabitants, as it does

55. Arvidsson regards Lassen as one of the key architects of the "biracial" theory of Indian history (i.e., the view that Indian civilization is comprised of two distinct racial groups; the higher castes of the Brahmans, Kṣatriyas, and Vaiśyas, which pushing into the Indian subcontinent, found a primitive aboriginal population whom they subjugated and integrated into their social hierarchy as the Śūdra caste). He considers Lassen's *Indische Alterthumskunde*, "the standard work about India's history for many generations" (ibid., 45), to be one of the key works of the nineteenth century that popularized the view of northern India as still being home to isolated groups of racially pure Āryans. For key passages, see Christian Lassen, *Indische Alterthumskunde*, vol. 1: *Geographie und die älteste Geschichte* (Bonn: H. B. Koenig, 1847), 406–08 (for the role played by race in the formation of caste), 408 (for the classification of Āryan Indians as "Caucasians" in virtue of their "physical type"); 408–10 (for racial mixing with the "Negros" as the reason for their decline); and 410 (for the Āryans as the genuine "cultural people" of India).

56. Though critical of the Brahmans, Lassen still regarded them as Āryans. Thus he noted that "they were the whitest in terms of color" and that "we may assume that they have retained their original color most faithfully." Lassen, *Indische Alterthumskunde*, vol. 1, 407. It is only later that we begin to see a change in attitudes toward the Brahmans as their faith comes to symbolize everything that is wrong with modern Indians. In this shift, the names Goldstücker and Holtzmann Jr. will have a major role to play.

57. This needs to be qualified, of course, since Lassen's "history" was actually a form of racial theory. It is more correct to say that he was interested in the epic as a historical work in order to bear out certain *a priori* ideas about the distinction between the two branches of the Caucasian race, the Indo-European, and the Semitic peoples. In this quest, the Mahābhārata played a major role, since he regarded the ability to develop "epic" as one of the hallmarks of the Indo-European race.

in terms of its extent.” The Mahābhārata, he further claimed, “is that Indian work that contains the maximum [number of] fragments of ancient history; the outlines of a universal history of ancient India, which are to be created in the future, can only be sketched out with the help of the *Mahābhārata*.” Lassen to be sure conceded that the Mahābhārata “could also be contemplated from the perspective of poetry.” But he wrote that he “touch[ed] upon this aspect only to exclude it from his following investigations.”⁵⁸

Regarding the literary or poetic approach to the epic, Lassen considered it “unavoidable” that the Mahābhārata was to be regarded “as a collection of old epic poems.”⁵⁹ These poems, he argued, “had accumulated around the epic of the battle between the *Kurus* and *Pāndavas*, as though about a fixed central point.”⁶⁰ Setting out from these premises, “different shorter and longer poetic narratives then present themselves in their self-contained form for an individual evaluation.” And finally, “a much more extensive dissection of the poem [into its constituent parts] would result automatically from the investigation into the plan and relationship of the whole.”⁶¹

When it came to understanding the “plan and relationship of the whole,” Lassen was similarly dogmatic: he noted that the two Indian epics themselves recount details of “the first composition and dissemination of each poem, to be sure in a legendary mode, but nonetheless in a way that certain historical statements may be gained from them.”⁶² He set aside the question of the commentators’ views as “insignificant” because “the oldest commentators, even if they should still be available, [were] not accessible to [him]”⁶³ and went over to a discussion of the historical insights that can still be gained from the epics’ self-presentation. Regarding the circumstance that the Mahābhārata refers to a doubled narration of the epic (once to Janamejaya and once to Śaunaka), Lassen argued that “it does not require any justification if I take this embedding [Einkleidung] for a real fact, namely, that one knew of two versions of the same material: an *older* [version], that related to the time of *G’ānamēg’aja* [Janamejaya], which is placed two generations after the great war (I. v. 3836); and a *later* [version].”⁶⁴ He also claimed that “a great portion of the introduction of the text at present is related to this later version, since everything that is found until page 80 of the printed edition, up to the *Ādivançaparva* or the book of the first generations, is only there to acquaint the listeners of *Saūti* with the things they must know in order to understand the occasion and purpose of the snake sacrifice of *G’ānamēg’aja* [Janamejaya] at which the *Mahābh.* was first narrated,” and from this he concluded, “*all this does not belong to the actual story of the great battle in any way at all.*”⁶⁵

Lassen also made three other claims that were to be decisive for the future course of Mahābhārata studies in the West. First, he argued that there had been an expansion in the poem “over and above the ambit of the battle between the sons of *Kuru*

58. Lassen, “Beiträge,” 61.

59. Ibid.

60. Ibid., 61–62.

61. Ibid., 62.

62. Ibid., 63.

63. Ibid., 64.

64. Ibid., 67 (*italics in original*).

65. Ibid., 68 (*italics added*).

[i.e., Dhṛtarāṣṭra] and *Pāṇdu*” and, in this expansion, “the entire early history of India had been added on to [the story of] this battle.”⁶⁶ Lassen backed up this theory with the observation that “in I. v. 101 the message has been preserved that the *Bhārata* itself consists of only 24,000 *ṣṭōka*’s without the episodes: ‘he made the *Sanhitā* (compilation) of the *Bhārata* of 24,000 *ṣṭōka*’s; this much is said to be the *Bhārata* without the episodes by the wise’.”⁶⁷ Second, he argued that “neither during the recitation of *Vaiṣampāyana* nor during that of *Sauti* is there any reference at all to a *written Mahābhārata* [*schriftlich aufgezeichnetes Mahābhārata*].”⁶⁸ Lassen conceded that the lists of contents “presupposed written exemplars.” “Only this is no reason to suppose that earlier, before the epic was written down, the individual narratives that are contained in the *Mahābhārata* did not pass on mouth to mouth, as is narrated of them in the poem itself.”⁶⁹ Here he presented his triumphant conclusion: “The mass and the complicated sequence of the parts of the *Mahābh.* rule out the thought that the whole, in *the* form in which we now possess it, could ever have been present except in written form. The first compilers of the present text may in fact have been the first to write down the poem.”⁷⁰ To underscore the point, he also added: “the industry that is ascribed to a single individual here is of such monstrous extent that criticism hardly has need of reminding us that the works that are attributed to *Vjāsa* derive from very different periods.”⁷¹ Third, Lassen claimed that the “transmission [of the poem]” (but not the original poem itself) was “in the hands of the priestly caste.” This had obvious consequences for the form and contents of the original historical narratives, which underwent a “transformation through the legend [i.e., through being repeatedly handed down, elaborated upon, and made more legendary].” But, Lassen argued, to this circumstance “came a further one: the dominant priestly element among the Indians, whitewashing and permeating all recollections of the ancient period with its colors.” Thus, “an investigation shows us quite rapidly that the priestly doctrines of the periodic human manifestation of the gods and of the world ages had taken possession of all historical lore and integrated it into its system.”⁷²

How to begin with a reconstruction of the original epic in service of the wider aim of compiling a history of ancient India? According to Lassen, “as a rule it was not difficult to recognize the transformation [the epic had undergone]; [but] what was difficult, often impossible, was to once again find the original form.”⁷³ Here, his two principles, mentioned above, came to his aid. The epic was to be read demythologically, as an allegorized version of a historical conflict between Āryans and Dravidians. Writes Lassen:

For reasons of length, I omit an investigation of the names *Pāṇdu* and *Kṛis’na*, *white* and *black*, and merely throw out the conjecture that they are to be interpreted as

66. *Ibid.*, 68.

67. *Ibid.*, 77.

68. *Ibid.*, 69 (italics in original).

69. *Ibid.*, 69–70.

70. *Ibid.*, 70 (italics in original).

71. *Ibid.*, 74.

72. *Ibid.*, 72.

73. *Ibid.*, 74–75.

references to the two races that fought each other in Indian prehistory: the originally native black [race] and the Sanskrit-speaking, light-skinned [race] that had immigrated from the north, whose western racial relatives are, even now, successfully fighting a similar battle with similar superiority over the *red* races of America.⁷⁴

Once this basic principle was in place, Lassen found it quite easy to explain the form of the *Mahābhārata*. As he wrote, “it is doubtless an important hint when it is said that the original *Bhārata* only comprises a fourth of the entire work that has been expanded with episodes. This detail directs our attention to additions of narratives, which did not originally belong to the epic of the *Kurus* and *Pāṇḍavas*.”⁷⁵ “What the original *Bhārata* is cannot be doubted: it is the dispute between the two ancient royal lineages; everything is related to this center and in many passages brief overviews are repeated with the aim of presenting the basic thread of the whole in the most encompassing version.”⁷⁶ To this core, which so admirably met his own interests in a universal history of ancient India, Lassen proposed that additional materials would have been added in three main phases:

First: narratives from older history, mostly concerning earlier kings, partly of a more mythic-historical nature, partly with a dominant poetic interest such as the episodes of *Nala*, of *Çakuntalā*, and many others.

The second category, to which I ascribe the stories of the gods is, at times, hardly to be distinguished from the first; I, however, include primarily the narratives with cosmogonic and theogonic content such as the creation of all beings by *Prag’ āpatīs* that is narrated in the first book.

Third and final: didactic and cosmogonic materials. The sections that are called *dharma* are doubtless of this nature; the *Bhagavadgītā* is another well-known example. The description of the earth, of divine worlds and other similar [descriptions] too evidence a doctrinal intent.⁷⁷

Lassen also proposed that the “central books of the war narrative [Kriegsgeschichte] (from the 6th to the 10th book),” since they contained the fewest episodes, were truer to the original plan of the epic (indeed, they contained the core of the original epic).⁷⁸ According to him, there were two motivations at work in this transformation of the epic: first, the intent “to turn the heroic book [Heldenbuch] into an instrument of indoctrination concerning the gods, laws and duties,” and, second, “to turn the *Bhārata* into a collection of old lore of Indian antiquity.”⁷⁹ “In the composition of the *Mahābhārata*,” he argued, “one had set oneself the goal of combining the most or the most important of what was present of the old epic narrative to a

74. Ibid., 75 (italics in original).

75. Ibid., 79.

76. Ibid., 80.

77. Ibid., 82.

78. Ibid., 82.

79. Ibid., 83.

whole.”⁸⁰ This (pseudo)historical reconstruction of the epic’s genesis led him to the observation that,

The *Mahābhārata* is thus a collection of old epic poems, which have been intentionally added on to the poem of the battle of the *Pāṇdavas*, [and] not a single old heroic legend [Heldensage], which in the course of oral transmission unconsciously fused other legends into itself. It is not a collection of historical songs in the genuine sense; the historical in the narratives has been preserved, so to speak, without the knowledge of the compilers [themselves].⁸¹

Thereafter he introduced his thesis of the epic as originally a Kṣatriya text—a thesis that was to dominate two centuries of the Western reception of the epic:

The collection was primarily intended for the warrior caste; their ancestors are the ones who are mainly praised therein; the epic poem was recited most solemnly at the royal sacrifices and although the lower castes were not excluded from hearing these poems, nonetheless no particular consideration was shown them [in the text]. The *Rāmājana* and *Mahābhārata* actually constitute the literature of the *ks’atrija* and the doctrine of the gods and religious view presented therein is not the purely priestly, which is contained more primordially, more symbolically, more physically and less anthropomorphically in the *Vēda*, but rather, the form that the religious doctrine had taken in the mind of the warrior caste.⁸²

Lassen also had an explanation to hand for the epic’s present form; he assumed that the *Mahābhārata*, though originally the property of the warrior caste, would have been taken over by the Brahmins at a later date, leading to the kinds of transformations he had already identified in the first part of his article. His precise words are as follows:

It is in the nature of their position [in society] and can also be read off from various provisions of their legal code that the Indian priestly caste had a clear awareness of the means...suitable for securing it lasting dominance over the minds of the remaining folk. It therefore cannot surprise us that we find epic poetry being used as an instrument of an addiction to spiritual domination....There was no more suitable means of raising the warrior caste in the priestly spirit than linking the instruction concerning religious and social laws to the narratives that already enjoyed general approval. That such an intention was realized in the diaskeusis of the *Mahābhārata* is clear to me from the large number and the extent of the didactic portions. In this sense, the *ākhjāna*, the epic poetry, can with full justification be called a fifth *Vēda* and the *Mahābhārata* a didactic book, a *çāstra*.⁸³

80. Ibid., 84.

81. Ibid., 85.

82. Ibid.

83. Ibid., 86.

In his later studies, Lassen turned increasingly to a reconstruction of ancient Indian history, geography, and ethnography. These studies are unrelated to our inquiries insofar as we are only interested in pursuing the question of the origin of specific Western dogmas about the Mahābhārata. Nonetheless, it is important to emphasize that even as Lassen in later years expanded the scope of his investigations massively beyond the Indian epic (in the process creating the first thoroughly racial reconstruction of Indian history), the Mahābhārata remained central to his work. It was the key text that allowed him to anchor his theory of a racial conflict between white and black races within Indian history. Thus, in the first volume of his *Indische Alterthumskunde*, he repeats his conviction that the Mahābhārata is to be interpreted as an allegorical reference to political events in northern India. He once again emphasizes that the names of the epic characters hold the key to this allegorical interpretation. “Pāṇḍu signifies *white* and this characterization is repeated in the name of his son *Arg’una*, from whom the following Pāṇḍava kings are descended.”⁸⁴ A few pages down, he clarifies,

Once it is established that in the story of the Pāṇḍavas names are present that do not signify individuals, but conditions and events, then we may also extend this principle to the remaining names of this sort. As such, the names *black* and *white* are especially prominent in the story of the sons of Pāṇḍu. As was already mentioned, *Arguṇa*, the ancestor of the later Pāṇḍava kings and the foremost hero of the ancient Indian heroic epic, signifies white; their most loyal friend, [and] their counselor in all their plans and the leader of all their initiatives is *Krishṇa*, that is, *the black one*; the daughter of Drupada, the king of the Pāṇḍala, the common wife of the five brothers, is called *Krishṇā* or *the black one*.⁸⁵

In spite of the language of white and black, however, Lassen did not have in mind a union between the two races, as might be thought to be implied by the fact of the alliance between the fair Pāṇḍavas and the dark daughter of Drupada. Rather, what he had in mind was a process of acclimatization or naturalization of the northern races to their new found home, leading to a relative darkening of the earliest invaders vis-à-vis later entrants into India. Thus, he argued that, “since the Pāṇḍala definitely belonged to the Aryan peoples, we may not interpret the relationship between them and the Pāṇḍava in such a way that the former, through the black color ascribed to *Krishṇā* [i.e., *Draupadī*] should be understood as being described as belonging to the black natives of India, the latter as the white Aryans.” “Nonetheless,” he continued, “the distinction in terms of color must have a meaning, and this can only be that the Pāṇḍala, as well as the Jādava who are represented by *Krishṇa* [*Vāsudeva*], both belonged to the Aryan peoples who had immigrated [into India] earlier, [that they] had become darker through the influence of the climate than the more recent immigrants from the north and, in contrast to these, were called the black ones.”⁸⁶

84. Christian Lassen, *Indische Alterthumskunde*, vol. 1, 634.

85. *Ibid.*, 641 (emphasis in original).

86. *Ibid.*, 643.

Lassen's views concerning the racial identity of the epic characters need not interest us further here. The task of tracing the *Rezeptionsgeschichte* of his racially grounded reconstruction of Indian history among a further generation of historiographers must be left to the historians of race.⁸⁷ For our purpose, it is sufficient to note that his racial theory constitutes a mainstay of his reconstruction of ancient Indian history in the first volume of his *Indische Alterthumskunde* (the same claims are repeated verbatim in the second revised edition⁸⁸) as well as playing an occasional role in his reconstruction of the middle and late periods in the successive volumes of the work. Thence, they would become the central tenet of all Western interpretations of the epic, including those of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (e.g., the work of James L. Fitzgerald). By proposing a pseudo-historical approach to the Indian epic, Lassen had laid the grounds for a thoroughgoing historicization of the Mahābhārata. Indirectly, he had also made it possible for Western Indologists to reengage with the Gītā in light of Hegel's critique. But before this step could be undertaken, a further step was required: a historicist interpretation of the epic itself. That step would be taken by Adolf Holtzmann Jr., who, combining Lassen's hypothesis of an original Bhārata with his own interests in Indo-Germanic antiquity, would in 1892 create the myth of an Indo-Germanic original epic, the so-called "Urepos." Before we can look at this step in Holtzmann's work, however, we first need to look at the work of his uncle Adolf Holtzmann Sr., as his ideas of a heroic epic or "Heldensage" were to be decisive for Holtzmann Jr.—and, beyond him, for an entire generation of Western scholars.

IDEAS OF HEROIC EPIC

The term *Heldensage* had already been introduced into epic studies by Lassen, who in his 1837 article had used the term to characterize the Indian epic. Lassen judged the Mahābhārata negatively against the standard of a true *Heldensage* like the *Nibelungenlied*, but did not provide a positive characterization of a true *Heldensage*. That task was left to Adolf Holtzmann Sr., who in his *Indische Sagen* of 1845 (second edition 1854) subtitled his "Nachbildung" or poetic rendition of the Kuru conflict a "Heldengedicht" (heroic poem).⁸⁹ (Holtzmann Sr. also used the term *Heldengesänge* to refer to the Indian legends.⁹⁰) The term *Heldengedicht* was then taken up and

87. See Tuska Benes, "From Indo-Germans to Aryans: Philology and the Racialization of Salvationist National Rhetoric, 1806–30," in *The German Invention of Race*, ed. Sara Eigen and Mark Larrimore (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 167–81. See also Dorothy M. Figueira, *Aryans, Jews, Brahmins: Theorizing Authority through Myths of Identity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002). Both authors make Lassen the key figure in the development of European theories of the superiority of the "Āryan" race—Benes directly and Figueira indirectly via Gobineau. According to Brustein, Lassen was the first person to introduce the contrast between "Āryan" and "Semite"; see William I. Brustein, *Roots of Hate: Anti-Semitism in Europe before the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 118 and 130.

88. Christian Lassen, *Indische Alterthumskunde*, vol. 1: *Geographie, Ethnographie und älteste Geschichte*, 2nd. rev. and expanded ed. (Leipzig: L. A. Kittler, 1867), 789 and 791 (hereafter cited as *Indische Alterthumskunde*, vol. 1, 2nd ed.).

89. Holtzmann Sr., *Indische Sagen*, 1.

90. *Ibid.*, vii and *passim*.

popularized by his nephew Adolf Holtzmann Jr. in his *Zur Geschichte und Kritik des Mahābhārata* of 1892 and thence entered into common usage in Mahābhārata studies. Before we look at the further history of the term in the younger Holtzmann, let us consider its uses in the work of Holtzmann Sr.

Holtzmann Sr. studied theology in Halle and Berlin, before passing his theological *Examen* (state licensing qualification) and taking up the post of vicar in Kandern. However, with state support he embarked upon a second career as a linguist. He studied Sanskrit in Munich under Othmar Frank, but was also especially interested in Germanic languages.⁹¹ Although from a scientific perspective of marginal value (in the words of his biographer, his work was characterized by “a passion for arbitrary combinations and an addiction to paradoxes, a great faith in his own intelligence and his reliance on unexamined prejudices”⁹²), his ideas are nonetheless important to us, as they crucially shaped Holtzmann Jr.’s views of the Indo-Germanic epic tradition and of the Mahābhārata.

Two of Holtzmann Sr.’s ideas were especially formative for the younger Holtzmann’s views: the first concerns his belief in the existence of a single common Indo-Germanic epic tradition; the second his belief in a revision of the ancient Indian epic in which the Kauravas, the heroes of the original epic, were portrayed as the aggressors of the story. Holtzmann Sr. articulated the first thesis in a work on the German epic the *Nibelungenlied*,⁹³ in which he claimed that, “just as the three epic peoples we know of, the Indians, the Greeks, and the Germans were originally one people and the Indian, Greek, and German languages were originally one language, so . . . also . . . the Indian, Greek, and German mythology were one and so too were the Indian, Greek, and German epic one.”⁹⁴ He also looked for concrete parallels between the two traditions, even at the price of violent alterations to the underlying texts. Setting out from his ideas of a common Indo-Germanic heroic tradition, in 1845 Holtzmann Sr. turned his attention to the Indian epic. His first publication, *Indische Sagen*, included translated excerpts from the Mahābhārata, above all an abridged version of the Kaurava conflict titled “Die Kuruinge.”⁹⁵ Holtzmann

91. See Wilhelm Scherer, “Holtzmann, Adolf,” in *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, vol. 13 (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1881), 16–18.

92. *Ibid.*, 17.

93. This was Holtzmann’s main area of research; in all he published five works on the subject: an edition titled *Das Nibelungenlied in der ältesten Gestalt mit den Veränderungen des gemeinen Textes herausgeben und mit einem Wörterbuch versehen* (Stuttgart: J. Metzler’sche Buchhandlung, 1857), reprinted in 1858 as a smaller “school edition” (poor schoolchildren!) as *Schulausgabe des Nibelungenlieds in der ältesten Gestalt herausgegeben und mit einem Wörterbuch versehen* (Stuttgart: J. Metzler’sche Buchhandlung, 1858), an edition of the “Nibelung’s Lament” titled *Die Klage in der ältesten Gestalt mit den Veränderungen des gemeinen Textes, als Anhang zum Nibelungenlied herausgegeben und mit einem Wörterbuch und einer Einleitung versehen* (Stuttgart: J. Metzler’sche Buchhandlung, 1859), and two interpretive works, *Untersuchungen über das Nibelungenlied* (Stuttgart: Adolf Krabbe, 1854) and *Kampf um der Nibelunge Hort gegen Lachmanns Nachtreter* (Stuttgart: Adolf Krabbe, 1855).

94. Holtzmann Sr., *Untersuchungen über das Nibelunglied*, 162–63.

95. *Indische Sagen* was initially published in 3 volumes: *Indische Sagen. Erster Theil. Savitri, nebst andern kleineren indischen Sagen* (Karlsruhe: Georg Holtzmann, 1845), *Indische Sagen. Zweiter Theil. Die Kuruinge. Ein indisches Heldengedicht* (Karlsruhe: Georg Holtzmann, 1846),

Sr. acknowledged that his translation was rather in the nature of a “Nachbildung” or poetic rendition, but he nonetheless claimed that his “Nachbildung” was truer to the spirit of the original.⁹⁶ Arguing that “the basic material [Grundstoff] of the epic was the downfall of the heroic lineage of the Kurus and hence the end of the heroic period,” he declared that “the ancient epic lore of the Indians is, to be sure, contained in the Mahābhārata, a not very old composition, but not in its complete extent, not in its pure form, but rather it has been repeatedly revised, mutilated, expanded, [and] distorted.”⁹⁷ His task as he saw it was “to purify the original itself of later defilement and to reconstruct it in its original form.”⁹⁸

The crux of Holtzmann Sr.’s reconstruction was the idea of the Mahābhārata as reflecting Indo-Germanic ideas of heroism and divinity. Thus he argued that the action in the original epic would have revolved around the drama of Bhīṣma’s fall from heaven, his exile and, following a great apocalyptic battle on earth, his return to heaven. As he put it,

Fischma, the Indian Zeus, ought not become the founder of a lineage during his exile among humans; he does not marry. But, subject to the fate of men, he must nonetheless beget sons. His descendants, however, are soon liberated from [their] exile. The downfall of a great heroic lineage, from the human standpoint a shocking catastrophe, is nothing other than the salvation of the children of the gods from their earthly exile. Thus, the heathens [Heidenthum] knew how to find consolation in sorrow itself.⁹⁹

Further, he argued that the Mahābhārata in the course of centuries had undergone a complete transformation in its outlook. Whereas the ancient bards had looked favorably upon Duryodhana, the great hero of the Kaurava side, later redactors, acting on political impulses, had changed the text to a paean in honor of the eventual victors of the war, the Pāṇḍavas. In his opinion, “anyone who even partially works his way through the surface of the Mahabharata toward its core, must recognize, that according to the original plan, right and virtue were on the side of Durjozana [Duryodhana].” In contrast, he claimed that “the later version” (i.e., the Mahābhārata epic as it currently exists) aimed to “purify the sons of Pandu and above all Krischna [Kṛṣṇa], the advisor and inventor of all evil intrigues; to glorify them as paragons of

and *Indische Sagen. Dritter Theil* (Karlsruhe: Georg Holtzmann, 1847). “Die Kuruinge” was contained in the second volume. All three volumes were republished in two parts in 1854 (*Indische Sagen. Zweite verbesserte Auflage in zwei Bänden*, vols. 1–2 [Stuttgart: Adolf Krabbe, 1854]), with “Die Kuruinge” being the first of the episodes in the first volume. All references in this book are to the 1854 edition.

96. “I frankly admit that not all traits in my recreation [Nachbildung] of the Indian epic will correspond with the original [Urbilde] once [Mahābhārata] criticism has succeeded in reconstructing it [the original] in its genuine beauty; I nonetheless believe that, initially at least, my re-creation provides a more correct idea of the original than a literal translation of the text as we now have it would do.” Holtzmann Sr., *Indische Sagen*, x.

97. *Ibid.*, vii.

98. *Ibid.*, x.

99. *Ibid.*, xi–xii.

all virtue and, in contrast, to heap reproach on Durjozana and his friends.”¹⁰⁰ Fully convinced that the original poem was an elegy for a heroic world on the verge of collapse (or for a heroic age gone by), Holtzmann Sr. also changed the epic’s conclusion to resonate with his Romantic ideas. In the original, the Pāṇḍavas triumph over the Kauravas in battle and establish a righteous kingdom. However, Holtzmann Sr. argued that it was more appropriate that in the conclusion “even Krischna [Kṛṣṇa] and the sons of Pandu meet [their] death in the final blood-bath...” This not only had the effect of restoring the balance of good and evil to the original but it also had the effect of concluding the narrative with the war books prior to the extensive philosophical and theological tracts of the Śānti- and Anuśāsana parvans, sections characterized by him as “unending edifying contemplations.” Justifying his changes, Holtzmann Sr. wrote, “it cannot be doubted that the genuine heroic poem ends there, where I conclude. Everything that follows breathes a completely different spirit. But, in order to attain a real conclusion, I had to let the Panduinge [Pāṇḍavas] themselves, not just their sons who take their place in the Mahabharata, fall before Aswatthaman’s [Aśvatthāman] sword of vengeance. Here, too, I believe that I have not changed, but, rather, restored the original.”¹⁰¹ A few lines down, he again emphasized the necessity of infringing upon the epic: citing the “multiple changes and expansions” the epic had undergone he declared that “there was need, both in small and large details, of long-winded critical work before the Sanskrit text would attain a form in which it deserved to be translated.” “This critical work,” he further continued, “would have to be left to a future editor of the text, but, for my purpose, the most important results of the same [process] must be, so to speak, guessed at in advance; and it is self-evident that I may thereby be much bolder than an editor would otherwise be permitted to be.”¹⁰²

But there was a second reason for Holtzmann’s advocacy of changes to the epic: a deep-seated antipathy toward the Brahmins, whom he saw as being responsible for the loss and destruction of the Indo-Germanic epic (indeed, with the loss and destruction of the Indo-Germanic world itself). Thus, he proposed that “the transformation of [the Kauravas] downfall into a return” was “impossible, as long as the heroic story [was] robbed of its mythological background by the interference of Wiasa [Vyāsa].” In the current epic, the Brahmin Vyāsa—not Bhiṣma—is the father of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Pāṇḍu, whom he begets on the widows of his half brother Vicitravīrya. Holtzmann Sr., however, proposed that this story was a fabrication, undertaken by the Brahmins with “no other goal than to make clear to the minds of the devout kings of India through an example of their ancient history, that they can encounter no greater joy than

100. Ibid., viii.

101. Ibid., xii; cf. also the equally nonsensical claim, “For example, toward the end of the poem, Durjozana [Duryodhana] is found lying in a pond. It must be clarified, how he came to be there. The Mahabharata in its present version finds the explanation in the cowardice of the king; he has run away from the battle and has hidden himself in the pond. But according to the original tendency of the poem the brave and fearless Durjozana cannot possibly show such an impulse of cowardice: for, the Homeric heroes may, of course, flee in fright without damage to their honor, but not the Indian [heroes].” Ibid., xi.

102. Ibid., xiv–xv.

when holy Brahmins are attracted to their wives and most kindly want to preoccupy themselves with ennobling their lineage.”¹⁰³ Elsewhere Holtzmann Sr. also lamented the “losses” that the “ancient national hymns” had suffered in the wake of “the later philosophical enlightenment.” “Everything miraculous, all direct involvement of the gods was...eliminated and clarified in terms of natural causes...the entire ancient Olympus of India had to fall before a rationalistic orientation and only a few traces of the genuine epic mixture of the divine and human worlds remain[ed]....”¹⁰⁴ But even more detrimental to the spirit of the old poem than this loss of ancient ideas of divinity was the introduction of new gods into the pantheon. Writes Holtzmann Sr.:

If this exit of the old gods is an irreplaceable loss, the interference of the younger gods, in contrast, of Wischnu [Viṣṇu], of Siwa [Śiva], of Dewi [Devī] led to the almost total destruction of the poem. In place of the poetic-miraculous, which let fantasy perform the work of the understanding, entered the degenerate-miraculous that resists the representing [faculty of] fantasy just as much as it does the thinking reason. The passages in which the cult of Siwa and of Dewi predominates can be easily eliminated; but the worship of Wischnu has penetrated everywhere and has transformed the magnificent epic almost into one of those boring and absurd works that one calls the Puranas.¹⁰⁵

Holtzmann’s views of heroic epic, especially his suspicion of the so-called Brahmanic changes to the text, were to have a long reception in the West. His comments about the tastelessness of the “Purāṣic” aspects of the Mahābhārata, for instance, were to be echoed by almost every Mahābhārata scholar of the nineteenth century. As late as 1978, it was possible for J. A. B van Buitenen, the translator of the Chicago edition, to claim, “not all scholars are interested in Purāṇic Hinduism. Some are interested in the text as one of the few world epics.... For them the sixth-century text as the earliest one recoverable is an invaluable source of information, and its homogenization with later Purāṇic text is completely detrimental to, if not destructive of, what little evidence is left.”¹⁰⁶ With the exception of a few scholars such as the French Sanskritist Madeleine Biardeau, scholars simply did not consider it necessary to either take the text in its extant form or its philosophical doctrines seriously. The fiction of an Ur-text, lying hidden behind or beneath the text as it was known in India and awaiting the tools of Western critical scholarship for its excavation and proper understanding, made it possible for scholars to ignore the Indian reception of the text entirely. Instead, they could now embark on the search for an epic that only existed for them, an epic postulated by them. It became possible to “do” Mahābhārata studies as a form of identity politics. The epic as received, read, and transmitted in India only existed to serve as a foil for German ideas of the heroic ancient Germanic

103. Ibid., xii.

104. Ibid., ix.

105. Ibid.

106. J. A. B. van Buitenen, “Introduction,” in *The Mahābhārata*, 4. *The Book of Virāṭa*, 5. *The Book of the Effort* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 152.

race, and the task of scholarship was identified with the recovery of the hypothetical original on the basis of spurious “text critical” criteria. Nowhere would this be truer than in the work of Holtzmann’s nephew, Adolf Holtzmann Jr.

THE INDO-GERMANIC EPIC

Although mostly forgotten by Indologists today (the one exception is James L. Fitzgerald, who advocates a neo-Holtzmannian position), Adolf Holtzmann Jr. is one of the key figures in the history of Western Mahābhārata studies. Holtzmann was the first to import the methods of biblical criticism discussed in the last chapter into Mahābhārata studies and also the first to make the task of reconstruction of the original the central ambition of scholarship. Partly by combining Lassen’s account of Indian prehistory and partly by combining his Adolf Holtzmann Sr.’s equally idiosyncratic views of a heroic age, Holtzmann created a potent myth about the so-called “Indogermanic original epic” (“Indogermanisches Urepos”) at the origin and center of the Indian epic.¹⁰⁷ He was the first to systematically use the expressions “redaction,” “inversion,” and “interpolation” to explain the transformations this original epic would have undergone to produce the Mahābhārata as we have it. In doing so, he established the dominant tenor and direction of German Mahābhārata studies and, via his great champion Hopkins,¹⁰⁸ was also able to export his ideas to the English-speaking world.¹⁰⁹ In the late nineteenth century, following

107. This myth continues until the present day. Besides the works by Fitzgerald and Brockington cited later, see also the work of Georg von Simson, especially his recent *Das Mahābhārata: Die Große Erzählung von den Bhāratas* (Berlin: Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2011). This book tries to resurrect German mythology about the epic for a new generation of readers in a more popular format, including the thesis of a Brahmanic takeover of the text; see *ibid.*, 590–92 (and see esp. 592 for Simson’s use of the language of the rivalry “between the temporal and the spiritual/intellectual power, between the sword and the word . . .” to give precision to the Kṣatriya-Brahman conflict).

108. Hopkins negatively reviewed Holtzmann’s book in *The American Journal of Philology* (13, no. 4 [1892]: 499–501). But he nonetheless cited and popularized certain of Holtzmann’s ideas (e.g., in his “The Social and Military Position of the Ruling Caste in Ancient India, as Represented by the Sanskrit Epic,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 13 [1889]: 57, n., and see also 60–65). It is safe to say that without Hopkins’ active involvement, Holtzmann’s name would not have reached American shores.

109. A concise summary of Hopkins’ views, as they were received and became canonical among twentieth-century Mahābhārata scholars can be found in John L. Brockington, *The Sanskrit Epics* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1998) and see also the various attempts by Fitzgerald to cast himself as Hopkins’ successor: James L. Fitzgerald, “The Great Epic of India as Religious Rhetoric: A Fresh Look at the Mahābhārata,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 51 (1983): 611–39 (see esp. 624: on “the authors’ loathing for the old Kṣatriya culture”; 625: on Kṛṣṇa’s encouragement of the Pāṇḍavās to use “perfidious” tactics—“perfidious, that is, from the perspective of the accepted Kṣatriya conventions of ‘chivalry’; and *ibid.* on Kṛṣṇa “deep” “animus against the conventions of Kṣatriya society . . .”); James L. Fitzgerald, “India’s Fifth Veda: The Mahābhārata’s Presentation of Itself,” in *Essays on the Mahābhārata*, ed. Arvind Sharma (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), 150–71 (Fitzgerald “suspect[s]” that the Mahābhārata was “as imagined most simply, an elaborate fabrication (basically

Holtzmann's postulation of the "Urepos," many scholars (key among them being the Tübingen scholar Richard Garbe) transposed Holtzmann's methods to the study of the *Bhagavadgītā*. Like Holtzmann, they began to see the *Gītā* as a historical document and, again like him, made it the central aim of scholarship to reconstruct an "Urgītā."¹¹⁰ Rather than the philosophical poem that had aroused the admiration of von Humboldt, the *Gītā* now appeared as a composite text comprised of many conflicting and contradictory views. The stage was thus set for its "historical" analysis and reconstruction in the laboratories of the Indologists.

Published between 1892 and 1895, Holtzmann's *Das Mahābhārata und seine Theile*,¹¹¹ a four-volume study of the *Mahābhārata*, was one of the first works to take a comprehensive look at the Indian epic. Of these four volumes, the most significant was the first volume, *Zur Geschichte und Kritik des Mahābhārata*, cited earlier. While Holtzmann drew on the views of predecessors such as Lassen and the British historians John Muir and J. Talboys Wheeler, he was also significantly influenced by the work of the senior Holtzmann and in his 1892 work declared right up front his allegiance to his predecessor's views.¹¹² He not only borrowed his uncle's thesis of a "revision" of the original poem,¹¹³ but expanded on it significantly to accommodate an entire theory of the "redactions" of the *Mahābhārata* (he proposed at least three) as well as of the evolution of religions in India (again, classified by him into three major stages):

According to the older poem, right and virtue is on the side of *Karna* and his party, according to the younger [poem] on that of *Arjuna*; *Duryodhana* is the lawful king, *Arjuna* and his brothers rebels, *Karna* is the embodiment of the knightly battle-code,

simultaneous with the invention of the *Bhagavadgītā*, which is the center and heart of our text"); *ibid.*, 154); James L. Fitzgerald, "Mahābhārata," in *The Hindu World*, ed. Sushil Mittal and Gene Thursby (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 52–74 (see esp. 72, speaking of a "Brāhmaṇ counter-revolution"); and "Negotiating the Shape of 'Scripture': New Perspectives on the Development and Growth of the Epic Between the Empires," in *Between the Empires*, ed. Patrick Olivelle (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 257–87 (see esp. 277: the *Mahābhārata* is "a vigorous counter-attack" by the Brahmins "to take matters into their own hands and negotiate the terms of their status and position with the armed forces within society in the presence of the rest of society around them").

110. Although that term would not be used until the early twentieth century when it was first introduced by the Marburg Indologist and historian of religion Rudolf Otto.

111. Adolf Holtzmann Jr., *Das Mahābhārata und seine Theile*, 4 vols. (Kiel: C. F. Haessler, 1892–95).

112. "The most important principle for the inner criticism of the *Mahābhārata* is the one established by Adolf Holtzmann in 1846, that the old poem's sympathies lay just as much on the side of *Duryodhana* as the current one valorizes *Yudhisṭhira* and his brothers and friends." Holtzmann Jr., *Zur Geschichte und Kritik*, 11.

113. Although Holtzmann Sr. is considered the author of the "inversion hypothesis," he does not use the term *Umkehrung* (inversion). There is only one passage in his *Indische Sagen* where he uses the term, but even then it is only in the form of the participle *umkehrend* ("Much more damaging and completely inverting [umkehrend] the original plan of the epic were changes of a polemical or apologetic nature." Holtzmann Sr., *Indische Sagen*, vol. 1, viii). Holtzmann Sr. does, however, use related terms such as *Umgestaltung*

Kṛṣṇa always advises trickery and deception: this is the stand-point of the old poem. *Yudhisṭhira* and *Arjuna* are paragons of every virtue, *Duryodhana* and *Kaṇa* sinful criminals; *Kṛṣṇa*, however, the embodiment of the highest god: this is the stand-point of the new poem. How one, however, came to leave the old interpretation and to take up the new, opposed [interpretation] is a puzzle whose solution must be sought there where Indian history has its genuine ground, the field of history of religion. It was Vishnuism that demanded and enforced this transformation.¹¹⁴

The central sections of Holtzmann's book were dedicated to working out how this change in religious and ethical ideals would have impacted the Indian epic. Here he focused on two main themes: the contrast between the ancient Indo-Germanic outlook and the Brahmanic outlook, and, partly overlapping with the first, the contrast between the Buddhist and the Brahmanic outlooks. Curiously, in this concatenation of revisions, Holtzmann saw real complementarity between the Indo-Germanic and Buddhist outlooks. According to him, Buddhism would have been sympathetic to the martial Indo-Germanic epic, in fact preserving its heroic oral poetry in the form of a written composition. He argued that later Brahmanic redactors, being just as hostile to Buddhist pacific ideals as to Germanic warrior ethics, undertook a thoroughgoing revision of the text—one indeed that went far beyond the boundaries of anything his uncle could have imagined.

Before we look at Holtzmann's theory of epic redaction (in the next chapter), let us look more closely at his understanding of the epic. We shall focus here on four areas: Holtzmann's view of the epic's origins, his view of its character, its composition, and its eventual decline.

1. Origins of the Epic

Like Adolf Holtzmann Sr., Holtzmann Jr. considered the Indian epic to be the outgrowth of a broader epic tradition, one extending from Germany to India. He quoted the earlier writer's work in support of his view of a common epic tradition rooted in a common ethnic identity.¹¹⁵ Like his predecessor, he attached great significance to

(transformation). In contrast Holtzmann Jr. appears to have truly popularized the theory with the use of terms such as *Umarbeitung*, *Umgestaltung*, and *Ueberarbeitung* (all of which mean roughly the same: revision). Occasionally, he also uses *Umwandlung* instead (roughly, transformation).

114. Holtzmann Jr., *Zur Geschichte und Kritik*, 14.

115. "The epic is ancient; the beginnings of the same lie far beyond history, just as the beginnings of nations, the beginnings of religions, the beginnings of languages. But just as comparative grammar has led to the insight that the three epic peoples, which we know of, the Indians, the Greeks, and the Germans were originally *one people*, and that the Indian, Greek, and German languages were originally only *one language*, so also one can already assert with certainty that the Indian, Greek, and German mythology is only *one*, and just as much that the Indian, Greek, and German epics were originally just *one*, Adolf Holtzmann Untersuchungen über das Nibelungenlied p. 162." Holtzmann Jr., *Zur*

the fact that “the Indians, together with the Germanic tribes and other peoples” at a certain stage in their development “constituted *one people*.”¹¹⁶ This thesis was his primary motivation for turning (in 1879) to the Mahābhārata in the hope of recovering the basic traits of this ancient Indo-Germanic folk.¹¹⁷

In essential respects, Holtzmann Jr. also followed Holtzmann Sr. in arguing that all three epic traditions (i.e., the Greek with the Iliad, the German with the Nibelungenlied, and the Indian with the Mahābhārata) would have been offshoots of a common tradition. Holtzmann identified this common tradition with the “Indo-Germanic Urepos” and argued (again, in an echo of Holtzmann Sr.) that “after their separation each people would naturally have refashioned its epic inheritance in its own manner.” Holtzmann considered it only possible to address the question of the nature of this ancestral epic once “the oldest attainable form of the epic among each of the individual epic peoples” had been attained.¹¹⁸ He regarded his reconstruction of the Mahābhārata as a necessary if initial step toward this ultimate goal and in this reconstruction (this too was a thesis of his uncle’s) he saw the addition of religious elements to the Mahābhārata as the main obstacle. Holtzmann Sr. had earlier argued that “in India it was primarily the religious movements that damaged the epic” and had blamed this damage upon “the younger religions, especially the worship of Siwa and the service of Wischnu [Viṣṇu].” In his opinion these newer movements “wanted to adapt and subjugate the old poetic national treasure to their interests; in the process this treasure had to suffer great losses and was defaced almost to the point of nonrecognition.”¹¹⁹ Like Holtzmann Sr., Holtzmann Jr. too regarded the original epic as being in tension with later doctrines. However, whereas his uncle was more circumspect about the possibility of being able to retrieve this original, Holtzmann was more optimistic about the possibility of identifying older sections of the epic. According to him, the great gulf in outlook between the Indo-Germanic tradition (heroic, honorable and warlike) and the Brahmanic tradition (passive, corrupt and philosophic and/or ritualistic) made it relatively easy to distinguish between original and nonoriginal sections of the epic. In this quest, he would focus especially on identifying a common “heroic” attitude—one he considered characteristic of the Indo-Germanic warriors of the ancient epic and the warriors of the German Nibelungenlied alike.

2. Characteristic Traits of Indo-Germanic Epic

Holtzmann considered the original epic to breathe a completely different spirit than the Mahābhārata as we have it today. In his words, the “old portions of the epic” were

Geschichte und Kritik, 42 (the quotation is from Holtzmann Sr.’s *Untersuchungen über das Nibelungenlied* and is the same one as cited earlier).

116. Holtzmann Jr., *Zur Geschichte und Kritik*, 42.

117. Holtzmann’s first work on the Mahābhārata was *Arjuna. Ein Beitrag zur Reconstruction des Mahābhārata* (Leipzig: K. J. Trübner, 1879). The work attracted little attention, but in 1892 he absorbed its central theses into his *Zur Geschichte und Kritik des Mahābhārata*.

118. Holtzmann Jr., *Zur Geschichte und Kritik*, 43.

119. Holtzmann Sr., *Untersuchungen über das Nibelungenlied*, 165.

characterized by a “thoroughly warlike worldview.” He argued that “instead of the elegiac wisdom, the resignation, being tired of life, of later Indian literature... the raw warrior-like air of the old Germanic North blows against us here.”¹²⁰ Indeed, he proposed,

If we were ever to succeed in determining the oldest cultural stage of the Indian race... and to dissolve away almost by means of a chemical process all influences of... Brahmanism... we would find conditions before us only a little different from those described by *Tacitus* as unique to the ancient Germans. But even in its contemporary ruined form the *Mahābhārata* often delivers us the best commentary on Germania. Here we read of the passion for gambling of the Germans, of how they wagered possessions and property, wife and child, [and] finally even themselves: *extremo ac novissimo iactu de liberate contendunt [sic]*.¹²¹

Holtzmann also proposed a number of specific parallels in support of this thesis. For instance, he wrote, “loyalty unto death is the highest duty of the warrior in relation to his leader: infame in omnem vitam ac probrosum superstitem principi suo ex acie recessisse. This statement holds literally for the heroes of the *Mahābhārata*.” “The same view that instilled contempt of death in the German warriors and made them unconquerable, namely, the firm belief that death on the battlefield opens the gates of heaven, also inspired the Indian heroes.”¹²² Holtzmann also wrote that “it is not fitting for the warrior to die at home of an illness, since ancient times his destiny is to fall by the sword,” an idea he, citing Holtzmann Sr.’s *Deutsche Mythologie*,¹²³ called “a completely ancient German thought.”¹²⁴ He argued that “the life of the gods” as “the faithful image of human life in the epic age” too was “a war-like one consecrated to battle.” “Like the Indian *Indra* [and] the Greek *Zeus*, the Germanic *Odin* too had to gain and assert his rule through battle.” He suggested that “the same indifference in the face of death as had so greatly impressed the Greeks... and Persians... about the Indians” could also be found among “the Germans and the Celts” (where it had similarly impressed the Romans) and he argued that this common indifference was “grounded in the same way in the firm belief that bliss awaits the brave warrior in heaven.” “Indian and German antiquity,” he thus reasoned, “simultaneously complement each other.” In the same passage, he also noted that “both races... hold the duty of blood-vengeance to be holy... , and then he argued, “one would rather presume to be reading an ancient German legend than a poem from the land of the tender-nerved Indians, when one comes across the narrative in which the revenge of *Açvatthāman* for the treasonous murder of his father *Droṇa* is described.”¹²⁵ Summing up the results of his analysis, he wrote:

120. Holtzmann Jr., *Zur Geschichte und Kritik*, 45.

121. *Ibid.*, 45–46.

122. *Ibid.*, 47.

123. Adolf Holtzmann Sr., *Deutsche Mythologie. Vorlesungen von Adolf Holtzmann*, ed. Alfred Holder (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1874) (the reference is to pp. 197–99).

124. Holtzmann Jr., *Zur Geschichte und Kritik*, 48.

125. *Ibid.*, 49.

We thus find some similarities in the conditions of the most ancient Indian and the most ancient Germanic periods; here and there we encounter a battle-lusty warrior race with all the seeds of culture alongside a cruel crudeness of passion. Whether here one must suppose [that the epic is] a recollection of a primordial age during which they lived together or a further development that ran parallel under similar existential conditions, I cannot decide here. [But] it is certain that the *Mahābhārata* has preserved traces for us that reach back to a very early period of Indian antiquity; that therein recollections of an Indo-Germanic primordial age have been preserved, is, at least so far, at best plausible.¹²⁶

In addition to these parallels, Holtzmann also cited a number of passages as evidence of direct borrowing between the two traditions. The *Nibelungenlied* served him as a basis for comparison. Thus, of the *Apsaras*, or celestial maidens of the *Mahābhārata*, he noted:

The *Apsaras* . . . are women who live freely, who dance at the court of *Indra* but also travel around the earth in the shape of birds—comparable to our swan-maidens;¹²⁷ . . . But they also have a warlike side. In the middle of the description of the battle it is narrated (8, 49, 76 = 2373) that the *Apsaras* raise the heroes who have fallen with wounds on their [i.e., on the warriors'] breasts onto their wagon and accompanied by the sound of trumpets carry them to heaven; in this moment, it is added, the warriors had fought truly valiantly. During the final decisive encounter between *Arjuna* and *Karna* both heroes are tired (8, 90, 18, 4640); they take a break from the battle [and] there appear the *Apsaras* [who] fan them with fans made of horse-hair and sprinkle sandalwood-water on them. Is one here not reminded of the Valkyries?¹²⁸

Holtzmann preferentially cast about in the war books of the epic for evidence of Indo-Germanic parallels. In general, the more cruel or more brutal the passage, the more likely he considered it to be borrowed from a German source. For instance, he cited the blood-drinking scene of the Indian epic as evidence of a connection between the *Mahābhārata* and the *Nibelungenlied*, but criticized the Indian account for having toned down “with lamentable sophistry” the horror of the original. As he put it,

[A] sign of ancient brutality . . . common to both the *Mahābhārata* and the *Nibelungenliede* [is that] the blood of the slain foe is drunk. As he had already sworn at the game, *Bhīmasena* drinks 8, 83, 28 = 4235 the blood of *Duḥçāsana* who is slain by him and calls out: never did I drink so sweet (this is even better than wine, it is said in the *Nibelungenlied*). This trait was too horrific to the later redactors; with lamentable sophistry they present the state of affairs 11, 15, 16 = 396 as though

126. *Ibid.*, 51.

127. The word is “*Schwanenjungfrauen*,” which literally means “swan virgins.” The *Nibelungenlied* briefly mentions two *Schwanenjungfrauen* as Hagen von Tronje sinks the Nibelungs’ treasure in the Rhein; they were later the model for Wagner’s *Rheintöchter*, or the “Rhein-maidens.”

128. Holtzmann Jr., *Zur Geschichte und Kritik*, 40.

Bhīmasena never really drank the blood, it reached his lips and not his throat and then he spat it out again.¹²⁹

To his mind, “the poet of the *Nibelungenlied*” “excuse[d] the drinking of blood” “much more elegantly” by referring to “the heat and the thirst under which his heroes have to suffer”¹³⁰ Karna, the antihero of the *Mahābhārata* offered him a third point of comparison with the myth of the *Nibelungenlied*. Karna is the unrecognized eldest son of Kunti and thus the eldest of the Pāṇḍavas. Due to a twist of fate, he ends up fighting on the opposing side—against his own brothers. Holtzmann, who had explicitly borrowed his uncle’s thesis of the revision of the original epic, found Karna irresistible. As the greatest warrior on the Kaurava side and a confidant of prince Duryodhana, Holtzmann considered Karna to especially incarnate the tragedy of the downfall of the heroic age. The fact that Karna is cursed to lose his knowledge of arms at a dire moment and tricked into giving up his invincible armor especially appealed to him. Apart from stirring Romantic ideas of the tragic hero undone by the treachery of those he trusted, Holtzmann found the entire narrative suggestive of Siegfried’s fate (in the *Nibelungenlied*, Siegfried is betrayed by his wife Kriemhild when she unwittingly betrays his weak spot to Hagen). As he wrote, “in the comparison of the Indian epic with the German [epic], the figure of *Karna* especially steps into the foreground. This unconquerable hero, the son of the sun god, definitely played the main role in the old poem. A foundling, he had to, although of divine descent, serve as a servant in the military retinue of a king; he wins a bride for his master, he kills an evil monster (*Jarāsandha*), he falls through treason and deceit. These traits clearly recall the legends of Siegfried; that is why recently the attempt has been made to prove the identity of the two.”¹³¹ Holtzmann returned repeatedly to Karna, emphasizing his greatness and the tragedy of his fall. He saw the story of Kṛṣṇa’s pressing of an unfair advantage (Karna’s chariot wheel is stuck in the earth; he begs a truce to free it, but Kṛṣṇa urges Arjuna to press home his advantage and the latter cuts off Karna’s head) as emblematic of how a later, less ethical age had done in the noble Indo-Germanic people. Whereas the latter, according to him, had adhered scrupulously to the “knightly” code at all times, Kṛṣṇa, who represented the new, rising ideology of Brahmanism, had exploited the Indo-Germans’ trusting nature leading to their eventual defeat.

3. Bardic Origins of the Epic

Concerning the epic’s origins, Holtzmann proposed that the earliest beginnings of the epic were to be sought in heroic poems sung by bards. He argued that although “the

129. *Ibid.*, 50.

130. *Ibid.*, 50–51.

131. *Ibid.*, 44. Holtzmann cites four references: Heinrich Leo’s *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte des Deutschen Volkes und Reiches*, vol. 1 (Halle: Anton, 1854); Adolf Holtzmann Sr.’s *Untersuchungen über das Nibelungenlied*, cited earlier; Johann Heinrich Becker’s *Mahābhārata: Der grosse Krieg* (Berlin: printed by author, 1888) and *Zur Deutung urzeitlicher Überlieferung* (Berlin: printed by author, 1889).

narrator of the *Mahābhārata* in our redaction is a learned Brahman,” this feature was not characteristic of “the older period.” Citing the fact that “next to *Vaiçampāyana*, the Brahman, appear as narrators two warriors, *Sanjaya* and *Ugraçravas*,”¹³² he argued in favor of the existence of “a *specific bardic class* at the courts of the kings, which was charged with the care of preserving of the epic . . .”¹³³ “The means of preserving and expanding this courtly poetry [would have been] . . . the *oral tradition*.”¹³⁴

Positively, Holtzmann characterized the epic as a form of heroic speech closely associated with (indeed, the possession of) the warrior caste. “The care of this mythology,” he wrote, “is a matter for the warriors; it is not in the huts of the hermits but in the courts of the kings that we have to seek the blossom of this epic and of epic mythology . . .”¹³⁵ And again: “For *the old epic poetry is the property of the warrior caste*.”¹³⁶ Holtzmann also argued that the epic would have been composed by bards in real time as they witnessed the unfolding events on the battlefield. Playing on the homonymy of *sūta* (which can mean both “bard” and “charioteer”) he argued that “originally, a *sūta* was a charioteer; he thus belongs to the warrior-class . . .”¹³⁷ Citing “the belief of the Indians themselves” regarding the antiquity of the epic, he claimed that “alongside the first king stood the first bards, who sang of his virtues and deeds.”¹³⁸ Further he argued:

These bards are also not missing in war, as we find them during the great battle in the camps of the two enemy kings. They themselves enter the battle in order to be able to observe the heroic deeds of the warriors themselves and to then sing of them; thus *Sanjaya*, the charioteer (*sūta*) of *Dhṛtarāṣṭra* narrates the entire battle to the latter, which he is present at as an eye-witness . . .¹³⁹

Holtzmann considered *Sanjaya*’s relationship to king *Dhṛtarāṣṭra*, although atypical in the context of the epic since king *Dhṛtarāṣṭra* is blind and therefore needs a narrator, to be paradigmatic of the relationship of the *sūta* to the king, since it offered him an example of an onsite charioteer who also takes on the role of narrator. He argued that, “one must remind oneself that in the main portion of our epic, in the description of the great battle, *Vaiçampāyana* hands over to *Sanjaya*, the friend of *Dhṛtarāṣṭra*. Every evening, after he has returned from the battle, *Sanjaya* narrates the events of the day to the blind king, at first briefly and then in detail . . . We thus have three narrators: *Sanjaya*, *Vaiçampāyana*, *Ugraçravas* and three listeners: *Dhṛtarāṣṭra*, *Janamejaya*, *Çaunaka*, which would agree with our assumption of an original poem and two revisions.”¹⁴⁰ He also cited the *Mahābhārata* itself as evidence of the close link between the

132. Holtzmann Jr., *Zur Geschichte und Kritik*, 52.

133. *Ibid.*, 54 (Holtzmann’s emphasis).

134. *Ibid.*, 59 (Holtzmann’s emphasis).

135. *Ibid.*, 41.

136. *Ibid.*, 57 (Holtzmann’s emphasis).

137. *Ibid.*, 54.

138. *Ibid.*, 56.

139. *Ibid.*, 54.

140. *Ibid.*, 157.

bard and the king: "In the description of the households of the kings these bards are constantly mentioned, for example, at the court of *Duryodhana* 6, 97, 30 = 4433 (*sūta* and *magadha*); king *Yudhishtira* employed according to 4, 70, 20 = 2279 eight hundred such bards and poets; also in the precise image of earthly life, in heaven, they are not missing, there it is the *Gandharvas*, who sing the praise of *Indra* 3, 41, 16 = 1678."¹⁴¹ (The circularity of his reasoning manifestly escaped him.)

Negatively, Holtzmann contrasted the epic with "the religious literature of the Brahmins," of which he wrote that it "ran alongside the epic literature, [although] both [were] completely independent of each other, only occasionally mutually using each other." Citing Max Müller, he argued for two fundamental *and opposed* traditions "*Epic* and *Veda*." According to him, though both were "equally ancient," "no bridge leads from the *Veda* to the *Mahābhārata*."¹⁴² Indeed, the contrast between the heroic Indo-Germanic outlook and the passive Indian outlook first gained its explanatory edge from this contrast between the epic and the *Veda*, which is why Holtzmann returned repeatedly to the thesis. He emphasized that "the epic had nothing to do with the religious literature of the Brahmins as it is represented in the *Veda*; it was the property of the warrior caste."¹⁴³ He further made it clear that he saw them not only as polar opposites but also in some sense as antithetical to each other. He also repeated his comment that the "the two literatures, the Brahmanic and the warlike, are completely independent of each other," this time replacing the *Veda* and the *Mahābhārata* by their surrogates Brahmanic and warlike.¹⁴⁴ With this substitution of the nouns by their metonyms, Holtzmann made it explicit that he considered the *Veda* and the *Mahābhārata* to be irrevocably tied to their respective social groups, while the juxtaposition of the two adjectives made it clear that their relationship was one of implacable opposition.

Holtzmann considered the *Mahābhārata* a composite work. It lay in the nature of the bardic and oral origins of epic poetry that the *Mahābhārata* could not originally have been a single work. Rather, Holtzmann appears to have had in mind a cycle of poems, some perhaps rather loosely connected to others, but the whole was nonetheless held together by the fact that these poems all centered on the intimate relationship between the king and his bard. This loosely connected collection of heroic poems, he argued, would have at some stage accumulated around a single central and dominant event or theme. Thereafter, he proposed, further elements would have been added to this nucleus. As evidence for the composite nature of the epic, Holtzmann cited three arguments. First, all "European scholars" recognized that "the *Mahābhārata* is not uniform; all agreed that the components of the work stem from different historical periods."¹⁴⁵ Second, "there is no lack of indications in the poem itself . . . that the epic was not always present in the form it is at present." In support, Holtzmann cited the first chapter of the first book, which he argued "declares quite forthrightly and clearly: the *Mahābhārata* was narrated at different times and by different poets . . . The poem is

141. *Ibid.*, 54.

142. *Ibid.*, 61.

143. *Ibid.*, 51.

144. *Ibid.*, 62.

145. *Ibid.*, 5–6 (Holtzmann's emphasis).

present in detailed and abridged versions . . . ”¹⁴⁶ Third, Holtzmann also argued that “the individual components of the poem differ in terms of their *content and style*.”¹⁴⁷ From this, he concluded that the epic, already in its inception a collection of bardic narratives and/or heroic songs, was not a unitary work. As he put it, “warlike heroic legend and priestly revision, true poesy and mystical blather, crude customs and later refinements, noble sentiment and dulled superstition” were united in the epic “in the most amazing variety and interpenetration.”¹⁴⁸ In particular, Holtzmann argued that what he called the “Brahmanic revision” would have been responsible for the presence of two clearly distinct ideologies or outlooks in the epic. According to him, “the Brahmans reworked the poem to their own ends and opposed a new, orthodox [rechtgläubige] redaction [of the epic] to the old epic. The latter was distinguished from the former by its glorification of the *Pāṇḍava* and the debasement of the *Kaurava*, by the inclusion of *Vishṇu* and the divinization of *Kṛṣṇa*, by the emphasis on orthodox [orthodoxen] Brahmanism.”¹⁴⁹ As motivation for this revision, he cited the fact that the Brahmans, facing a challenge to their demand for absolute authority, “could not simply brush aside the popular epic poetry.” In light of this fact, he argued that “it is quite conceivable that with the assistance of a devout and talented poet, an attempt was undertaken to replace the *Mahābhārata* with a new, purely Brahmanic heroic poem, albeit one based on the old epic lore.”¹⁵⁰ This project, according to him, led to the combination (and accidental preservation) of the old bardic poems with the new philosophico-religious outlook of the Brahmans, leading to the present epic.

4. Decline of the Epic

Even though Holtzmann’s main interest was the retrieval of the characteristics of the ancient Indo-Germanic people, his work also placed a great deal of emphasis on their decline. For instance, he repeatedly returned to the theme of the doomed heroism of the Indo-Germanic peoples, a heroism that tinged all their actions with a tragic cast. He wrote of the epic’s composer, “He [the poet] shows us the tragic struggle of two principles; of knighthood, whose time is over; and of the newly arising politics, and presents the former to us in all the glory of a setting sun.” He further characterized the conflict between these two worlds in terms of an ethical contrast: “With rising interest, we see how the old honest battle-ethics of the knights after a brave defense succumbs to treason and deceit.”¹⁵¹ As though there could be any doubt about his interpretation of this conflict, he explicitly clarified:

The contrast of the forces which collide with each other here is tragic: on the one side stands the old bold heroic order which only knows an open, honest battle, whose

146. Ibid., 7 (Holtzmann’s emphasis).

147. Ibid., 8 (Holtzmann’s emphasis).

148. Ibid., 9.

149. Ibid., 128.

150. Ibid., 136.

151. Ibid., 89.

sole pole-star is the fame that is praised in enthusiastic verses, which in proud confidence in its own power scorns all calculations of pragmatic reason.... In lively contrast, we see on the other side the clever and scheming art of a *Kṛṣṇa*, who, himself no warrior, knows how to arm the arms of brave heroes for his own purposes through sophistic eloquence. His enterprise is victorious, *victrix causa diis placuit sed victa poëtae* [*sic*].¹⁵²

Among the many changes Holtzmann lamented was the loss of the heroic outlook which he characterized in terms of the contrast between the knightly code of war and its “modern” counterpart:

The heroes saw war more as a knightly sport, as an honest duel, than as genocide and as little as they spared their opponent’s life in a regular duel, so little did they resolve to ambush him when he was already being attacked by others, or to kill him when he had begged for pardon, or indeed to take him by surprise at night in [his] sleep.... These rules the *Kauravas* follow till the end of the battle; the *Pāṇḍavas* in contrast, on the advice of the sly *Kṛṣṇa*, leave them out of consideration in all important cases: this is the judgment of the old poem...¹⁵³

Holtzmann also cited the contrast between the values espoused by Duryodhana and the Kauravas (the heroes of the old epic according to him) and those espoused by Kṛṣṇa and the Pāṇḍavas as evidence of a decline in values from the old epic to the new. Of prince Duryodhana, the leader of the Kauravas, he wrote: “*Duryodhana* is a thoroughly worthy figure.... Of course, in the complete expansion of the poem, as it is now present to us, *Duryodhana* is to be presented as a coward; but no narrative, which is necessary and indispensable for the plan of the work [Holtzmann means the original plan as hypothesized by him], confirms this unfair judgment; the old traits cannot be completely obscured.”¹⁵⁴ In contrast, he regarded Kṛṣṇa as the epitome of the new Brahmanic outlook. Of his principles, he noted that, “they stand in glaring contrast to the knightly outlook and way of acting of *Karna* and his comrades, to whom nothing is more hateful than falsehood and breach of promise; they represent the old principle of honest battle, [while] they [the Pāṇḍavas] are representatives of a new principle, of a faithless politics.”¹⁵⁵ According to him Kṛṣṇa’s adventures did not “bear the imprint of the old heroic legend; he [was] not a knightly champion; [and] he demonstrate[d] more cunning and deceit than actual bravery...”¹⁵⁶ Further, he argued that

the difficulty *Kṛṣṇa* has in teaching *Arjuna* [to accept] his principles, the sharp rebuke *Arjuna* receives from the other warriors due to his actions, who accuse him

152. *Ibid.*, 90.

153. *Ibid.*, 79–80.

154. *Ibid.*, 72.

155. *Ibid.*, 87.

156. *Ibid.*, 131.

of consorting with the low-minded *Kṛshṇa* ("who can act thus if he is not a friend of *Kṛshṇa*?" 7, 142, 86 = 5964), the condemnation *Rāma* the son of *Vāsudeva* expresses, [and], on the other hand, the emphasis *Duryodhana* places on the fact that he has gone the path of the fathers clearly shows that, at least in the poet's representation of the *dharma-yuddha*, the honest battle is the custom of the ancient knightly age, while the faithless politics of *Kṛshṇa* appears as a newly emergent principle.¹⁵⁷

Holtzmann attributed this loss of ethics primarily to the rise of Brahmanism. Here he suggested that "the victory of the Brahmanic system [over the Indo-Germanic outlook] forced epic poetry ever further back; to the Brahmins every view that was in some way historical was questionable."¹⁵⁸ Citing Max Müller, he argued that "the heroes of the poem . . . breathe a completely different intellectual and religious atmosphere than the poets, who collected and concluded the work." Of the latter, he wrote that they had "changed and obscured the epic character of the work through their didactic tendencies; they were clearly Brahmins brought up in the strict school of the Laws of Manu."¹⁵⁹ Summing up, he asserted in his conclusion that the Brahmins "have transformed the ancient heroic poem, the greatest spiritual treasure of their people into a tedious Purana that only preaches worship of *Vishṇu*, reverence before the Brahmins, and thoughtless good works."¹⁶⁰

In addition to underpinning his ideas of the Indo-Germanic peoples, the narrative of decline also played a central role in Holtzmann's reconstruction. In pursuit of his ideal of a pure warrior epic, he used this narrative to explain why the Indo-Germanic epic postulated by him could not be found except in fragmentary form. Further, it allowed him to make the old epic into a kind of legendary work, a mystic object comparable to the lost Holy Grail sought by the knight Percival. (As much ingenuity he expended on recovering this original, one suspects that he would have been much less excited to discover a complete, intact specimen.) The appeal of the old epic lay precisely in its ruined, fragmentary, and elusive character. The narrative of decline simultaneously permitted him to portray his pursuit as a kind of knight-errant quest. It colored his own researches with an air of wistfulness and, ultimately, futility. Paradoxically, it was precisely this quixotic nature of the quest that endowed it with significance. (Before him, Holtzmann Sr. too had taken up arms against the conclusions of the Lachmannian school. In his *Kampf um der Nibelunge Hort gegen Lachmanns Nachtreter*, he attacked Karl Müllenhoff [1818–84] and Moriz Haupt [1808–74], the main proponents of the Lachmannian view at the time, for what he saw as their prepossession against the old epic.) Holtzmann Jr. saw himself as taking up arms on behalf of a lost antiquity. As was typical of the Romantic age, he valued the old merely because it was old. His thesis of a pure warrior epic first acquired its

157. Ibid., 87–88.

158. Ibid., 66.

159. Ibid., 16 (the reference is to Max Müller's *History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature So Far as it Illustrates the Primitive Religion of the Brahmins* [London: Williams and Norgate, 1859], 46).

160. Holtzmann Jr., *Zur Geschichte und Kritik*, 194.

explanatory edge from the (alleged) contrast with the values of the Brahmanic age. It was thus, paradoxical as it may seem, not directed against the past but against the present. As was true of Romanticism in general, Holtzmann activated an ideal of the past as an element of a critique of modernity itself. This made his work, for all its restorative tendencies, thoroughly modern. If Lassen was the founder of German Mahābhārata studies, Holtzmann Jr. can, with justification, be called the father of modern Mahābhārata studies.

THE BIRTH OF MODERN MAHĀBHĀRATA STUDIES

Lassen had originally analyzed the Indian epic as the record of a historical conflict between white Āryans and black indigenes, where both the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas, though partially fictionalized, nonetheless represented historical groups. (Lassen did not fully clarify how, if the names Arjuna and Pāṇdu were references to the white skin color of the protagonists and the Pāṇcālas, as he argued, were also an Āryan tribe, the conflict between the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas could be mapped onto a conflict between white Āryans and black indigenes.) To be sure, the theory of a Brahmanic takeover of the text was already present in incipient form in the background. Nonetheless, Lassen was careful to distinguish between what he believed the epic to have originally been—an explicit record of the Āryan/Dravidian conflict—and what he believed it became as the Brahmins tried to take over the epic: an inadvertent record of a Brahman/Kṣatriya conflict. While there are elements in his work that might suggest a mapping of the latter on to the former (Āryans being most typically associated with Kṣatriyas),¹⁶¹ this was ruled out by the fact that he considered the original epic to be purely about a martial conflict (the conquered black indigenes were warriors no less than the conquering white Āryans) and by the fact that he placed the two events (Āryan/Dravidian battle and Brahmanic/Kṣatriya conflict) far apart in time.

After Lassen, Holtzmann Sr. interpreted the Mahābhārata battle in terms of a conflict between legendary, semidivine heroes. Bhīṣma and the other heroes, he argued, were divine beings fallen to earth; following an apocalyptic battle, “the children of the gods” would return to heaven. Holtzmann Sr. thus interpreted the Mahābhārata in terms of a dualistic eschatological framework. Holtzmann Jr., in articulating his ideas of the epic as the record of a struggle between the old Indo-Germanic outlook and the new Brahmanic outlook, drew on the work of both these predecessors. From Lassen, he acquired his ideas of the Indo-Germans as a fair-skinned northern race. From Holtzmann Sr., he acquired his ideas of a pan-Asian Germanic race spanning the Eurasian continent from Germany in the west, via Greece and Persia, to India in the east. However, he disregarded Holtzmann Sr.’s idea of the epic as a mythological

161. Lassen was an exception here. He regarded the Brahmins as being of Āryan origin; in fact, they represented the pinnacle of the color-based caste system for him. See his *Indische Alterthumskunde*, vol. 1, 407; the relevant passages are quoted earlier in this chapter.

or literary conflict and instead advocated the epic as the record of an actual conflict. This conflict, according to him, would have taken place alternatively between Indo-Germanic peoples and Brahmanic protagonists and between Buddhist and Brahmanic protagonists. (As little as Lassen was Holtzmann Jr. able to explain how if the *Mahābhārata* had originally been a collection of bardic poems recording the heroic deeds of Indo-Germanic warriors before they entered into India it could then be a record of their conflict with indigenous elements.) But whereas the elder Holtzmann had been careful to keep his ideas of Indo-Germanic peoples (articulated primarily in his works on the Germanic and Norse epics) separate from his ideas of the heroic epic (articulated primarily in his work on the Indian epic), the younger Holtzmann conflated the two. Not realizing that his uncle had been speaking about two different things—on the one hand, about a common Indo-Germanic (and Greek) oral tradition and on the other, about a common heroic epic that was the content or the preferred object of exegesis of this tradition—Holtzmann Jr. combined the two in his image of the heroic Indo-Germanic warrior. Holtzmann Sr.'s fictional semidivine heroes now became the prototype of Holtzmann Jr.'s Indo-Germanic warriors (see chart 1.2 for Holtzmann's conflation of these several different theories of the epic).

To this tripartite confusion (confusion of Lassen's pseudohistorical researches with Holtzmann Sr.'s literary researches and confusion of Holtzmann Sr.'s epic researches with his literary researches), Holtzmann Jr. added a third, fatal one: he confused Lassen's and Holtzmann Sr.'s theories of a Brahmanic revision of the text with the epic narrative itself. Lassen in 1837 had already postulated that the Brahmins would have taken over the original warrior epic, centering on the rivalry of the Kaurava princes for the throne of Hastinapura. However, beyond pointing to the theosophic elements of the epic as likely candidates for Brahmanic additions, he had not further specified how this takeover might have occurred. Lassen's central concern remained the conflict between the two races he had postulated; the Brahmanic hypothesis remained marginal to his concerns.

After Lassen, the first to expand on the mechanics of the Brahmanic takeover had been Holtzmann Sr. In his 1845 work, he asserted a revision of the text in which the Kauravas, originally the heroes of the epic, were portrayed as the aggressors, while the Pāṇḍavas, originally the villains of the epic, were portrayed as righteous figures. He attributed this revision to Brahmanic redactors, interested in glorifying (and thus aligning) themselves with the eventual victors of the war. Holtzmann Sr., however, also extended this theory beyond the political arena to the text itself. Specifically, he cited a number of changes in the text that would have been made by the Brahmins. Chief among these was the introduction of Vyāsa as the progenitor of the Kauravas. Holtzmann Sr. argued that this fact was an innovation of the Brahmins, who wished to impress upon the kings the advantage of allying themselves with these powerful men. However, Holtzmann Sr. considered these changes not to have affected the basic plan of the poem, which was still organized around the theme of a heroic conflict. As he wrote, "here [i.e., regarding Vyāsa's genitorship] there can be no doubt that my change is a re-creation of the original. In point of fact, the heroes everywhere refer to Fischma as their grandfather and the passages in which Wiasa enters into

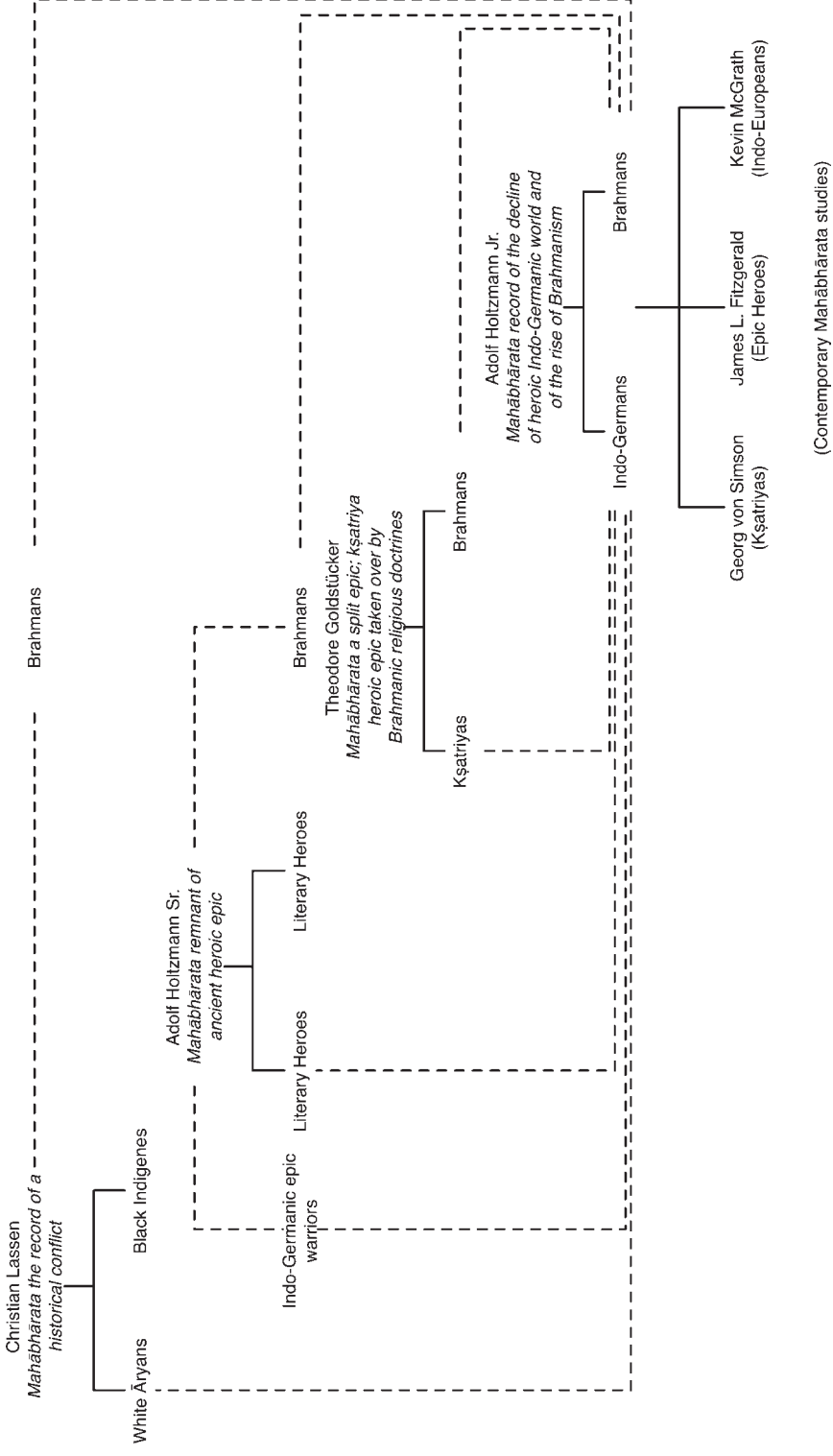


Chart 1.2 Descent of German theories of epic and their conflation in the work of Holtzmann
Chart of German Mahābhārata scholarship, showing how different authors had different understandings of the combatants of the Mahābhārata and the descent of these theories via the work of Adolf Holtzmann Jr., in which they were finally conflated.

and affects the action are all easily recognizable as later additions.”¹⁶² Holtzmann Sr. thus placed the Brahmanic revision anterior to the prototypical conflict itself, which he continued to see as heroic in origin. Though the Brahmans revised the text, they simply reversed the polarity of the epic without implicating themselves, apart from these minor and easily removable changes, in the narrative.

Finally, Theodor Goldstücker, building on the work of Lassen, in 1864 proposed that the “groundwork of the poem” would have been “the great war between two rival families of the same kin; it occupies the contents of about 24,000 verses.” He further opined that the Mahābhārata, as “a record of the greatest martial event of ancient India,” could not have failed to attract the attention of the Brahmans, from whose perspective “such an exaltation of kingly splendour and of the importance of the military caste” would have “threaten[ed] to depress that of . . . [their own] Brahmanical caste” in equal measure. For this reason, he argued, the Brahmans would conspire to become “the arrangers of the national epos; and as the keepers of the ancestral lore, as the spiritual teachers and guides, as priestly diplomatists, too, they would easily succeed in subjecting it to their censorship.”¹⁶³ Then, conflating Lassen’s theory of Brahmanic expansion with Holtzmann Sr.’s theory of Brahmanic revision (in the mean time, Lassen himself had veered around to a theory of Brahmanic revision so it is not necessary that Goldstücker read Holtzmann Sr.¹⁶⁴), he argued that this “aim” would have been “effected not only by the manner in which the chief story was told, but also by adding to the narrative all such matter as would show that the position and might of a Kshattriya depends on the divine nature and favour of the Brāhmana

162. Holtzmann Sr. *Indische Sagen*, xi.

163. Goldstücker, “Hindu Epic Poetry: The Mahābhārata,” 388.

164. Lassen argued that “the form in which the lore about their [the Pāṇḍavas’] history has been preserved to us is not the genuine and original; rather, it has been distorted in certain respects; the portrayal has been consistently revised to the advantage of the winning dynasty, [and] to the disadvantage of the defeated predecessors and it is only possible through this revision [Umarbeitung] to discover and reconstruct their true story.” Lassen, *Indische Alterthumskunde*, vol. 1, 2nd ed., 774. He also claimed that “in order to glean historical pickings from the Pāṇḍava legend, as it is now present to us, the first task of criticism [Kritik] must be to determine the meaning of these names [i.e., Kaurava and Pāṇḍava] and to reduce it back to its validity [i.e., whether real or invented], to trace out the older version of the narrative and to purify it from the additions and distortions of a later age; only once this has been done, can the second part of its business [i.e., of criticism] begin: collection of the remains of old, real history.” Ibid., 775 and see also 783 (“from which [i.e., that Duryodhana is also often referred to as Suyodhana] one may assume that there originally existed narratives in which he [Duryodhana] appeared in a different light than in the current portrayal which has been revised in the interests of the Pāṇḍava”), 827 (“Since the entire legend has been reversed to the advantage of the Pāṇḍava, it is plausible to suppose that in an earlier form of the narrative he [Duryodhana] did not attain power through deception [in the dice game], but drove the Pāṇḍavas out of their kingdom through honorable victories”), and 828 (“revision of the old legend to the advantage of the Pāṇḍava”). Although Lassen did not cite Holtzmann Sr., it is quite clear that his source for these ideas was the Freiburg scholar. Holtzmann Jr. criticizes Lassen for not acknowledging his uncle as his source; see Adolf Holtzmann Jr., *Das Mahābhārata im Osten und im Westen* (Kiel: C. F. Haessler, 1895), 180–81.

caste.”¹⁶⁵ While “here and there an old legend or myth might be found in the epos, apparently not betraying such a set purpose,” Goldstücker considered it beyond question that the Brahmins’ “object” would have been “to make the Mahābhārata a *Brahmanical* encyclopedia for the military caste, and a powerful means in the hands of the Brahmins of swaying the Kshatriya mind . . .”¹⁶⁶

Holtzmann Jr. borrowed elements from each of these three authors’ theories, but reworked them in his own way. For instance, while he borrowed the “inversion hypothesis” of Holtzmann Sr., he overlooked the latter’s distinction between epic characters and epic composers (or epic redactors). Whereas his uncle had retained the epic’s character as a kind of Ragnarök scenario (with the Brahmanic characters merely having a marginal role and being *supplemental* to the original text), Holtzmann Jr. made the thesis of a Brahmanic revision central to the text. He interpreted the epic characters *themselves as Brahmanic protagonists or partisans*. Kṛṣṇa, according to him, was not only the archetype of the Brahmanic outlook, but he was also a historical figure associated with or implicated in the rise of Brahmanism. Thus, what had originated as a theory of extra-textual political changes with some blowback on the epic was now firmly anchored as an architectonic principle of the text itself. Further, citing Goldstücker as evidence, Holtzmann Jr. argued that the Mahābhārata epic was itself the record of these religious conflicts. Kṛṣṇa represented the rising ideology of Brahmanism and the key conflict at the center of the epic was not (as one might expect given Holtzmann’s theory of bardic composition) between heroic warriors versus other heroic warriors, but between heroic warriors and cowardly priests.¹⁶⁷ According to him, the poet of the epic undertook to show “the tragic struggle of two principles; of knighthood, whose time is over; and of the newly arising politics, and presents the former to us in all the glory of a setting sun.”¹⁶⁸ (Holtzmann did not clarify how, if the Brahmanic element first entered the epic with the redaction of the Brahmins, the old epic could already have been concerned with the tension between these two outlooks. Nor was he able to clarify how, if the poet already understood the struggle between the two principles as “tragic” and that the “time . . . of

165. Goldstücker, “Hindu Epic Poetry: The Mahābhārata,” 388–89.

166. *Ibid.*, 389.

167. The significance of this shift should not be underestimated. Before Holtzmann, the general consensus was that the Brahmins were an Āryan group; in fact, they stood at the apex of the Āryan social order. Thus, writing in 1852, Weber could still declare that “One thing, however, can be confidently stated of the Mahā-Bhārata, namely, that it is based upon a battle that was fought in Hindustan between the Āryan peoples, and hence [the epic] belongs to an age when their settlement and the subjugation and Brahmanization of the aboriginals was already complete.” Albrecht Weber, *Akademische Vorlesungen über indische Literaturgeschichte* (Berlin: Ferd. Dümmler’s Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1852), 177. Weber thus followed a long line of scholars in treating the Āryan invasion or conquest as synonymous with the Brahmanization of India. It is only after Holtzmann that we find Brahmanization treated as a form of reverse colonization, in which the Āryans, having defeated the native inhabitants of India, nonetheless succumb to their inferior culture.

168. Holtzmann Jr., *Zur Geschichte und Kritik*, 89.

knighthood...[was] over,” the Brahmins could have or, indeed, would have needed to reverse the polarity of the epic.)

Clearly Holtzmann, though hugely influenced by Goldstücker, had not fully understood him. Goldstücker, to be sure, had shifted the balance of epic studies from Lassen’s white Āryans versus black indigenes theory to a Kṣatriya versus Brahmins theory—a change likely motivated by his sympathies with the colonial administration.¹⁶⁹ Whereas Lassen had been speaking of a conflict rooted in ancient history, Goldstücker was more concerned with what he saw as the continuing effects of a religious subservience (to the Brahmins) he traced back to the medieval period. Lassen’s theory held that a historical conflict between foreign intruders and native tribes had been laid down in the epic, which was thus anterior to the historical circumstances it depicted. Goldstücker, in contrast, was speaking of a conflict that had been (through the Brahmanic take over of the text) *overlaid over* the epic; the epic was thus posterior to the historical circumstances it depicted. It was only accidental to the plan of the epic that it came to reflect a Kṣatriya versus Brahman conflict. Thus, even though he focused more on the Kṣatriya-Brahman conflict, Goldstücker was nonetheless still in agreement with Lassen that the original epic, which he like Lassen considered to be the epic of 24,000 verses, centered around a Kṣatriya-Kṣatriya conflict.

Holtzmann Jr., however, misunderstood Goldstücker’s divergence from Lassen. Goldstücker was shifting focus from the original epic to the secondary epic but he was not simply replacing Lassen’s protagonists with his own; rather, he was placing a second set of protagonists alongside Lassen’s original protagonists. Holtzmann, however, took him to be speaking of the same epic and the same conflict, which is why he ended up conflating not only Lassen’s white Āryans with Holtzmann Sr.’s Indo-Germans (and the latter’s Indo-Germans with his mythic heroes), but also Holtzmann Sr.’s Indo-Germans with Goldstücker’s Kṣatriyas. In all, he ended up conflating four different theories to produce his Indo-Germans (this is shown on the left-hand side of the chart). On the right-hand side of the chart, he again conflated three different theories of the priests and their role in the history of the Indian epic: from Lassen he acquired the idea of a Brahmanic takeover of the text; from Holtzmann Sr., the idea of a Brahmanic revision of the text; and from Goldstücker, the idea of placing the Kṣatriyas and Brahmins in direct opposition. In this way, he was now able to anchor the Kṣatriya-Brahman conflict within the text itself by conflating the historical dimension (identified with Lassen) with the narrative and textual dimensions (identified with Holtzmann Sr. and Goldstücker, respectively). The Brahmins, through no fault of theirs, had become the counterconcept to Indo-Germanic Āryans. The theory could now emerge of the Mahābhārata as a record of a conflict between Indo-Germanic and Brahmanic partisans—a theory that was to have a long and powerful *Wirkungsgeschichte* in modern Mahābhārata studies.

169. See August Leskien, “Goldstücker, Theodor,” in *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, vol. 9 (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1879), 341; see also N. J. Allen, “Theodor Goldstücker,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* 22 (2004): 699–700.

Beyond Holtzmann Jr., Mahābhārata scholars continued to seek (and to defend the normative ideal of) the old epic. They did so without knowing the source of their ideal of epic. Further, they frequently invoked concepts such as “Brahmanic redaction,” “Kṣatriya epic,” and so on, without being aware of the genesis of these concepts, that is, their history in the work of Lassen, Holtzmann Sr., Holtzmann Jr., and Goldstücker as we have traced it here. For the most part, these works were essentially derivative (though they did not hesitate to describe themselves as offering original, exciting new research on an old question). They would exchange or switch around a few elements (was it the Nandas who had offended against Brahman ideas of privilege? Or the Mauryas? or perhaps the Śākās?), but essentially the story they recounted was the same one as that recounted by the two Holtzmans over a century ago. In spite of what they conceded was “the essentially speculative nature of this interpretive enterprise,”¹⁷⁰ they did not hesitate to cast the Mahābhārata as reflecting Brahmanic ideas of proper kingship.¹⁷¹ In effect, they were reprising all of Holtzmann’s anti-Catholic, anti clerical prejudices, while pretending to offer independent, objective evaluations of the epic. Yet, once we become aware of the history of this scholarship, it also becomes impossible to use terms such as “bardic, oral epic,” “Kṣatriya epic,” or “Brahmanic redaction” with the same naïveté. Nowhere will this be more true than of Holtzmann’s views of the Gītā as a pantheistic text that underwent a theistic revision.

HOLTZMANN’S LEGACY TO GĪTĀ STUDIES

It was important for us to trace the genesis and outlines of Holtzmann Jr.’s views of the Indo-Germanic epic, because these ideas would, via their reception among a broad spectrum of Indologists in the nineteenth century, crucially influence twentieth-century views of the Bhagavadgītā. For instance, almost all of the authors of the Indological Gītā would draw in some way on his thesis of the Mahābhārata as originally a war narrative with later Brahmanic “interpolations.” To be sure, this thesis had already been broached by Lassen in 1837. But it was Holtzmann who, by expanding Lassen’s idea into a comprehensive theory of multiple “redactions” (he traced at least three: a Buddhist poetic composition around second century BCE,¹⁷² a Vaiṣṇavaite-Kṛṣṇaite revision around the third century CE,¹⁷³ and a final Śaivaite and/or Purāṇic redaction around tenth century CE¹⁷⁴), first created a matrix broad enough to accommodate the Gītā scholars’ variform analyses of the poem’s different “layers.” Thus scholars could now debate whether a verse in the poem belonged to its original epic substratum, to its Vaiṣṇavaite theological revision, or to its absorption

170. James L. Fitzgerald, “No Contest between Memory and Invention: The Invention of the Pāṇḍava Heroes of the Mahābhārata,” in *Epic and History*, ed. David Konstan and Kurt A. Raaflaub (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 108.

171. *Ibid.*, 113–14 and 116.

172. Holtzmann Jr., *Zur Geschichte und Kritik*, 106 and 126.

173. *Ibid.*, 151.

174. *Ibid.*, 172 and see also 97–98.

of a popular Kṛṣṇa cult. Further, by conflating the literary and historical planes, Holtzmann enabled a peculiar flexibility in their interpretations. Scholars could now spring back and forth between the two. They could take literary effects or references as evidence of historical conditions, and vice versa. For all his unsubstantiated theories about white Āryans and black indigenes, Christian Lassen had still been concerned with a degree of historical objectivity in his researches. Admittedly, he was a second-rate historian. He had absolutely no historical training and, in his work, we can already see traces of the basic tendency of German Indologists to conflate textual sources with historical data. Lassen also lacked objectivity, since he considered research into Indian antiquity primarily as a means to sharpen the contrast between the “Indo-Germanic” and “Semitic” peoples.¹⁷⁵

But what Holtzmann did went far beyond the bounds of Lassen’s meager attempts. By effectively freeing Mahābhārata studies from textual strictures, he turned them into an aesthetic venture. The task of textual reconstruction, henceforth, would be based purely upon the individual scholar’s aesthetic evaluation (in this context it is significant that Holtzmann’s uses the words “aesthetic evaluation” or “aesthetic appreciation”¹⁷⁶ (*ästhetische Würdigung*) to describe his reconstruction of the text, and the scholar himself was liberated to give free expression to an aesthetic encounter with the text, including both positive (appreciative) and negative (distasteful) aspects. As Holtzmann noted of the epic,

even in its present form [and] in spite of all distortions it is able to captivate not only the Indian listener but also the European reader; I do not doubt that the old poem, should its recreation be possible, could be placed boldly alongside the Iliad.¹⁷⁷

Thus it now became possible for scholars to reconstruct (in the name of historical-critical reconstruction to be sure) their own normative ideal of the Gītā based on a priori subjective ideas of philosophy, rationality, theism, mysticism, and so forth. In doing so, scholars would not only draw on Holtzmann’s conflation of literary and historical planes, but also, and more specifically, on his peculiar confusion of literary characters or themes with historical references and both these again with the presumptive religious sectarian conflicts that we traced in the preceding section.

Finally, Holtzmann also left a very specific legacy to Bhagavadgītā studies through his assertion (made in his 1893 text *Die neunzehn Bücher des Mahābhārata*) that the Bhagavadgītā had originally been a pantheistic text reflective of Indo-Germanic views of heroism in battle and fearlessness in the face of death before it underwent a revision at the hands of Brahmins. But since this thesis is best discussed in the context of other German Indological Gītās, we defer a discussion of it to the third chapter. In the next chapter, we continue with a look at the broader intellectual and historical currents underlying Holtzmann’s prejudices.

175. See Lassen, *Indische Alterthumskunde*, vol. 1, 414–17, possibly the first comprehensive “scientific” account of the distinctive features of a Semitic “race.”

176. Holtzmann Jr., *Zur Geschichte und Kritik*, 69.

177. Ibid.

CHAPTER 2



The Search for German Identity

Believing in that promise the German Protestants... entered upon the struggle.

Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Reden an die deutsche Nation*

INTRODUCTION

In the preceding chapter, we looked at the German reception of the Mahābhārata and found that reception to be based on several unwarranted and illegitimate assumptions, chief among them the presumption that the Mahābhārata, being “epic,” must have originated among Kṣatriya circles. The chapter further demonstrated how, beginning with the racial and historicist prejudices of Lassen and Holtzmann, a specious branch of science had developed, dedicated to explaining how the Mahābhārata, whose hypothetical origins were among Kṣatriya warriors, could have evolved into the work of Brahmanic lore we possess today.

Building on our survey of the origins of German Mahābhārata studies in these unscientific, irrational and Romantic arguments, this chapter undertakes a detailed reconstruction of the most important German Mahābhārata interpretation of the day: Adolf Holtzmann Jr.’s *Zur Geschichte und Kritik des Mahābhārata* from 1892. As we saw in the preceding chapter, Holtzmann’s Mahābhārata stands at the center of German scholarship on the epic. Not only does it combine in some way almost every theory of every major Mahābhārata interpreter who went before, but these conflations (e.g., between Lassen’s “white Āryans” and Goldstücker’s “Kṣatriyas,” etc.) crucially shaped the course of future Mahābhārata studies everywhere. In light of this, the bulk of this chapter is dedicated to a reconstruction of Holtzmann’s views of the epic.

In the first twelve sections of this chapter, we focus on Holtzmann’s Mahābhārata. Sections 1 and 2 outline Holtzmann’s work and his polemics against Brahmins. Sections 3 and 4 discuss his ideas of critical reconstruction and epic composition. Section 5 to 7 explore his ideas of religious conflict, textual corruption and historical distortion, in that order. Sections 8 and 9 discuss his identification of Buddhism with Protestantism, while section 10 discusses his identification of Brahmanism with Catholicism. Section 11 explores his ideas of racial contamination. Section 12 then

turns to Holtzmann's ideas of textual reconstruction and shows how, in Holtzmann's hands, the reading of the epic was transformed into a reading of Germany's history, especially its struggle for religious and national self-determination. In particular, we demonstrate how Holtzmann was motivated by a desire to recover an ancient, glorious Indo-Germanic past for Germany, as well as to valorize the Buddhist period in India as a foil for German scientific consciousness. In section 13, we then turn to Oldenberg's *Mahābhārata*, showing how, by the early twentieth century, Holtzmann's prejudices regarding the epic had become established dogma. Although Oldenberg entered the *Mahābhārata* debate relatively late in 1922 with his *Das Mahābhārata: Sein Inhalt, seine Entstehung, seine Form*, this work is nonetheless important for understanding how Holtzmann's views were given a veneer of scientific legitimacy by later scholars. As our main concern in this chapter is to present a representative cross-section of German views of the Indian epic, most sections consist mainly of longer quotations from the two scholars. Commentary is kept to a minimum. A concluding section then examines the consequences of this model of textual criticism for the *Mahābhārata* in general and the *Bhagavadgītā* in particular. Specifically, we focus on the reasons why, in spite of the role played by the oral epic hypothesis in German anti-Semitic rhetoric,¹ a section of contemporary *Mahābhārata* scholarship continues to defend

1. The theory of the *Mahābhārata* as originally an oral epic was initially proposed by Lassen in 1837. In later years, it played a crucial role in his ideas of Indo-Germanic superiority. For instance, distinguishing between the "Semitic" and the "Indo-Germanic" races in 1847, he argued that "the latter, however, are without doubt the most talented." Although he acknowledged that the Semitic peoples also made contributions to culture, science, and the arts, he claimed that "they [i.e., the Semitic and Indo-Germanic peoples] are not equal regarding these achievements and, among the Caucasian peoples, we must decisively grant the laurels to the Indo-Germans." Crucially, he regarded the ability to develop "epic" as the hallmark of the superior intellectual powers of the Indo-Germans. Thus, he wrote that "history is evidence that that the Semites did not possess that harmonious balance of all psychic powers through which the Indo-Germans became preeminent." Specifically, he charged that the Semite "cannot separate the relationship of the world to man in general from that [i.e., the relationship of the world] to his own 'I'; he cannot represent ideas in the mind in pure objectivity; his way of looking at things is subjective and egotistical. His poetry is lyrical [and] therefore subjective; his spirit expresses its joy and its pain, its love and its hatred, its admiration and its scorn." According to Lassen, even if the Semitic poet "expand[ed] his horizon," it was "only in order to represent his tribe as an individual over against others [i.e., other tribes]." Here he raised his key objection: "He [i.e., the Semite as a type] is unsuccessful at [creating] epic [Epos] because here the 'I' of the poet steps back before the object [and] even less at drama, which demands that the poet cast off his personality even more completely [than is the case in epic]. [But] the Indo-Germans possess, alongside the lyrical also the other genres of poetry; they alone have brought forth a national drama; they alone have brought forth the great heroic poems [Heldengedichte] that reflect the great deeds of antiquity handed down in the legend in glorified form, that present the entire worldview of the spirit of a people [Volksgeistes] to us and that stand there as the result of the poetic effort of an entire people." "The Semites," he concluded, "are lacking in the material [Stoff] of the epic," and even though they possess legends, they have shown themselves to be incapable of "compil[ing]" these legends "into larger cycles." Lassen, *Indische Alterthumskunde*, vol. 1, 414–15. This obsession with identifying "epic" or "heroic epic" with the Indo-Germanic peoples largely drove German efforts to demonstrate a heroic epic at the heart of the Indian text. It also mislead later scholars into thinking that the Indian epic (or at least some portion of it) had to conform to their expectations of "epic."

the hypothesis even in the face of the evidence of the Critical Edition.² Chapter 3 then resumes our look at the German Gītā.

THE GENESIS OF HOLTZMANN'S MAHĀBHĀRATA

Published in 1892, Adolf Holtzmann's *Zur Geschichte und Kritik des Mahābhārata* is the key text for understanding modern Mahābhārata scholarship, especially in some of its more toxic manifestations such as its virulent anti-Brahmanism. Even though elements of anti-Brahmanism were already present in the work of earlier scholars such as Lassen, Holtzmann's *Zur Geschichte und Kritik* outdid all these earlier works in its violent attacks upon Brahmins. Let us see how Holtzmann builds up to his critique of Brahmanism. We begin, in this section, with an overview of his critical project.

Zur Geschichte und Kritik is divided into 16 chapters. Its two central chapters are chapter 6 ("The Indo-Germanic Original Epic") and chapter 12 ("Buddhism and the Mahābhārata"); these two divide the entire work into roughly three parts. Chapters 1 through 5 lead up to the central hypothesis of the Indo-Germanic original epic, while chapters 7 through 11 develop this thesis. Chapters 13 through 16 then develop the Buddhist hypothesis: the first two focus on the epic as a poetic composition written in the period of the Buddhist "Aufklärung" (Enlightenment) and chapters 15 ("The First Brahmanic Revision") and 16 ("The Second Purāṇic Redaction") argue for a conflict between Buddhism and Brahmanism in which the epic was fashioned into a potent tool of Brahmanic propaganda. The weight of Holtzmann's revisionistic tendencies falls on chapters 6 and 12, which are thus the key to understanding his interpretation. Broadly speaking, Holtzmann made nine central arguments in the book, arranged as follows:

1. The epic is not a uniform work (chapter 2).
2. It bears the imprint of two distinct religious, theological, and political outlooks (chapters 3, 4).

2. With the completion of the Critical Edition of the Mahābhārata in 1966, the scope for oral epic theory was further reduced. Completed on the basis of the rigorous principles of textual criticism, the Critical Edition offered conclusive evidence that all extant Mahābhārata manuscripts were descendants of a single written exemplar, and that this archetype contained elements such as the narration of the epic at a sacrifice, the entire Bhagavadgītā, the Śāntiparvan including the highly theological Mokṣadharmaparvan—precisely the elements considered by the defendants of oral epic theory to be "late" and "Brahmanic." The Critical Edition thus blew a hole not only in their theory of the epic's genesis, but also in their theory of its transfer in authority from Kṣatriya warriors to Brahman priests. Since then, their efforts have shifted to highly complex theories dedicated to explaining how the archetype might have existed and still need not rule out the existence of an older oral epic tradition such as Andreas Bigger's nonsensical "normative redaction" hypothesis (which, however, we deconstruct in a separate work; see Vishwa Adluri and Joydeep Bagchee, *Philology and Criticism: A Guide to Mahābhārata Textual Criticism* [London: Anthem Press, forthcoming]).

3. It also bears traces of an “inversion,” in which the originally heroic side is portrayed as the evil side (chapters 4, 5).
4. The oldest epic “layer” is that of the “Indo-Germanic epic” (chapter 6).³
5. The older epic was the property of the “warrior caste” and gave expression to a “warlike worldview” (chapter 7).⁴
6. The second stage of the epic was that of a poetic composition (chapter 8).
7. Two worldviews collide in the epic: the old heroic outlook and the new Brahmanic outlook (chapters 9, 10).
8. The poetic composition of the epic can be located in the Buddhist period, a period of economic and scientific progress and cultural blossoming (chapters 12, 13, 14).
9. The final stages of the epic are represented by two Brahmanic redactions, the first of which introduces Viṣṇu into the text, the second Śiva (chapter 15, 16).

These considerations of aesthetic and apologetic changes, however, were only preliminary to Holtzmann’s real goal: to use the epic to recover the outlines of a “Germanic” culture. Like his uncle before him, Holtzmann considered the epic to be “ancient,” its “beginnings” to lie “far beyond history.” Its roots, according to him, lay in a common oral epic tradition shared between the “three epic peoples . . . the Indians, the Greeks, and the Germans.”⁵ Following their dispersal from their original homeland, he argued that “each of the individual races naturally refashioned and developed its epic inheritance in its [own] way . . .” However, he considered that “individual traces of their original belonging together [Zusammengehörigkeit]” could still be detected in their successor epics (i.e., the *Iliad*, the *Nibelungenlied* and the *Mahābhārata*).⁶ Even though he focused outwardly on a recovery of the oral archetypes of each of these epics (“[the] theory of the Indo-Germanic original epic,” he wrote, “has . . . found little resonance until now” and it “will be time to address this question more closely . . . only when we first are completely clear about the oldest reachable form of the epic among all the individual Indo-Germanic peoples”⁷), his real concern was the recovery of this Indo-Germanic original epic. This quest, however, was not restricted merely to the search for a text, oral or otherwise. Rather, his primary aim was to instantiate his image of the ancient Germanic peoples as a pure Āryan race. According to Holtzmann, the ancient Indo-Germans were a fair-skinned northern race; they embodied a heroic warrior culture; they were courageous, loyal unto death, and they considered the duty of blood-revenge to be holy. In this quest for Āryan origins, polemics against the Brahmins would be especially useful for distinguishing between Germanic and non-Germanic sections of the epic.

3. The word “layer” (*Schicht*) is not used by Holtzmann himself, who speaks rather of “redactions” (*Redactionen*). However, as it has become popular in German scholarship, we will use it sometimes as shorthand.

4. *Kriegerisch* may be translated both as “warrior-like” or “martial” (*Krieger*, warrior) and as “warlike” (*Krieg*, war). We use both, depending upon the meaning appropriate to context. *Kriegerisch* and derivatives are the adjectives most commonly used by Holtzmann to characterize the (old Indo-Germanic) epic.

5. Holtzmann Jr., *Zur Geschichte und Kritik des Mahābhārata*, 42

6. *Ibid.*, 43.

7. *Ibid.*

POLEMICS AGAINST THE BRAHMANS

Building on his uncle's theories that later Brahmins would have made a whole host of apologetic and polemical changes to the epic, Holtzmann undertook to demonstrate how these Brahmins corrupted and destroyed the Indo-Germanic way of life. In particular, he charged that the Brahmins introduced an entirely new set of values into the poem, even writing themselves into the epic as the sires of the heroes of the Kaurava dynasty:

The heroes of the poem, says Max Müller (anc. Sanscr. lit. p. 46), breathe a completely different intellectual and religious atmosphere than the poets who collected and concluded the work. The latter changed and obscured the epic character of the work through their didactic tendencies; they were clearly Brahmins brought up in the strict school of the Laws of Manu. And Goldstücker (Hindu epic poetry p. 35) says: we take it for granted that the *Mahābhārata* is a traditional record of an early period of Hindu history, compiled, however, by eminent men of the Brahmanical caste—the chief object of these editors, arrangers, and modellers, always remained the same, to demonstrate the necessity and the sanctity of the Brahmanical law.⁸

In the old poem, as the lineage died out with the death of *Vicitravīrya*, it was manifestly his older brother *Bhishma* who had declined the kingship and marriage, who begat sons with the widows of *Vicitravīrya*: *Dhrtarāshtra* with [the widow] *Ambikā* and *Pāṇḍu* with [the widow] *Ambālikā*. In the current poem, he is requested to do so by *Satyavati*, the mother of *Vicitravīrya*. He should, she says, not permit his ancestors to fall into hell through losing the sacrificial cake. But he refuses and so in his place enters *Vyāsa* the son of *Parācara*, namely, the man who is supposed to have composed the entire poem, a Brahmin from the lineage of *Vasishṭha*. Now the intent behind the change becomes clear. In place of the levirate marriage, which was found to be objectionable, an even more offensive means of propaganda should enter: representation by a Brahmin . . . Here the sublime wickedness of the Brahmins reaches its highest degree; the kings should be made aware that already in ancient times the ennoblement of the warrior-class through Brahmins was regarded positively. The levirate marriage, which began to be considered objectionable, provided the occasion for such narrations and was replaced by an even more offensive relationship.⁹

Aside from this criticism of the Brahmins as illegitimate intruders into the text, Holtzmann also charged that the Brahmins (in particular in the form of their protagonists, the *Pāṇḍavas*), were not an Āryan race. In his words,

The *Pāṇḍavas* likely signify a not purely Aryan race, [but] a thieving hill-folk [räuberisches Gebirgsvolk], as they are called among the Buddhists, [a hill-folk] who advanced victorious from the North; in the *Himalaya* polyandry can be found even today (Stulpnagel in Indian Antiquary Band VII 1878, cf. also Julius Jolly "zur

8. Ibid., 16–17.

9. Ibid., 29–30.

Indischen Rechtsgeschichte" ZDMG 34, 341) and among the *Pāṇḍavas* it was probably ancient, so that *Yudhisṭhira* could invoke the custom of his ancestors. Then of course, the *Pāṇḍavas* cannot originally have been blood-relatives of the *Kaurava*.¹⁰

Holtzmann also accused the Brahmins of introducing new gods (and a new faith) in place of Indo-Germanic ideas of the soul's afterlife and of heaven. In his opinion, gods such as Śiva and Viṣṇu were of Brahmanic origin. Thus, whereas the ancient Indo-Germans had mainly worshipped the warlike Indra, he argued that the Brahmins imposed the worship of these later deities upon the people. He further claimed that the Brahmins also instituted a highly ceremonialized religion in place of the nature worship of the ancient Indo-Germans:

But besides that, the genuine *epic mythology* shows through in many luckily preserved traces. The old poem was, as the relatively well-preserved episodes such as those of *Nala* and *Sāvitri* show especially clearly, free of *Çiva* and *Vishṇu* and did not know the system of incarnation. Just as little as this mythology knew of the later folk-gods and, on the other hand, as little as the speculative-theological system knew of the pantheistic *ātman*, so little did the epic know of the old mythology of nature symbolism; rather, this epic created its own anthropomorphic mythology and represented the conditions of human society in it in an idealizing fashion.¹¹

The king [of the gods] is *Indra*, because he, the hurler of lightning-bolts, among all the gods most demonstrates a warlike side.¹²

Against these Brahmanic or, perhaps, neo-Brahmanic intrusions, Holtzmann argued that the mythology of the ancient Indo-Germans had originally been linked to that of the Greeks.

The epic mythology of the Indians has a great similarity with that of the Greeks. On [the banks of] the Ganges, both views of mythology, the speculative-theological and the anthropomorphic, ran unmediated and unbalanced next to each other; [whereas] among the Hellenes, the mythology of the epic poets, especially since it found a powerful ally in the plastic arts, suppressed the old nature religion completely.¹³

The epic mythology of the Indians is as richly developed to think as the Greek, only it is less well preserved; it is as ancient as the Persian; precisely in the mythological views of the *Mahābhārata* H. H. Wilson finds traits, "which may be derivable from an old, [if] not from a primitive, era" (Vis. Pur. Einl. S. 5).¹⁴

In time, however, Holtzmann argued, the rising power of Brahmanism succeeded in suppressing the ancient epic tradition. He speculated that although the Brahmins found the epic useful as a vehicle for their ideology, they also discriminated against it.

10. Ibid., 33.

11. Ibid., 36 (Holtzmann's emphasis).

12. Ibid., 37.

13. Ibid., 40.

14. Ibid., 40–41 (insertion the authors').

"The religious literature gradually pushed back the old gods among the Brahmins and later, through their growing influence, among the warriors too, and placed little value on the entire epic poetry; the *itihāsa* and *purāṇa* are ascribed in the *Çatapathabrāhmaṇa* to the fishers and fowlers Weber L. G. 137."¹⁵ In its place, the Brahmins instituted an alternative mythology. This new mythology allegedly consisted of accounts of things divine and cosmological, but paid little attention to the human and historical. Holtzmann writes:

Furthermore, one must note that one must definitely distinguish between divine legend and heroic legend. In the explanation of the former, the cosmogonic side and its anthropomorphic application is decisive; in the second, the historical side [is decisive]. The Indian heroic legend had, till now, made an impression on every impartial reader that it is historical and not symbolic in origin.... The immediate impression that the heroic legend in the *Mahābhārata* makes upon us is undeniably that here real history [Geschichte] wants to be presented.¹⁶

Holtzmann's anti-Brahmanism cannot be understood without reference to his project of identifying a heroic Germanic tradition. The Brahmins were essentially the counterconcept to his Germans. Brahmanism offered him a way to explain why the pure Indo-Germanic epic postulated by him could not be found. Moreover, it offered him a framework for distinguishing between older and more recent sections of the epic. In particular, it allowed him to undertake a so-called critical reading of the epic based on four assumptions we call the "bardic hypothesis," the "Kṣatriya hypothesis," the "war narrative hypothesis," and the "Brahmanic hypothesis."

IDEAS OF CRITICAL RECONSTRUCTION

As we have seen, Holtzmann's ideas of critical scholarship were significantly influenced by Adolf Holtzmann Sr. Like his uncle before him, the younger Holtzmann had little formal training in textual criticism. Instead, he relied on what he called "internal criticism" (*innere Kritik*) of the epic to reconstruct its older form. This inner criticism relied mainly on his assumption of a change in perspective in the epic, which he, along with his uncle, attributed to the Brahmanic revision of a heroic original. Thus

15. *Ibid.*, 41.

16. *Ibid.*, 41–42. Holtzmann appears not to make any distinction between *Geschichte* (which can also mean "narrative," "story," the root meaning of Greek ἱστορεῖν) and *Historie*. Grimm's etymological dictionary (*Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob Grimm und Wilhelm Grimm*, 16 vols. [Leipzig: Verlag von S. Hirzel, 1854–1961] records of *Historie* that it is "*schon im mhd. aus dem lat. historia, in dem sinne von geschichtserzählung, bericht herübergenommen.*" *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, s.v. "Historie." Of *Geschichte*, Grimm's records: "*ahd. und mhd. gesciht, f. schickung, zufall, ereignis, verstärktes schiht, das eine ableitung von ahd. scehan 'durch höhere schickung sich ereignen', dem stammverb von geschehen (s. d.), und noch im mhd. und md. erhalten ist, ahd. nur in den zusammensetzungen anaskiht eventus, miss-skiht fortunae asperitas, niuskiht prodigium.*" *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, s.v. "Geschichte."

he wrote, “the most important sentence for the internal criticism [innere Kritik] of the *Mahābhārata* was the one presented in 1846 by Adolf Holtzmann, that the old poem stood with its sympathies as much on the side of *Duryodhana* as the present one highlights *Yudhishtira* and his brothers and friends.”¹⁷ Based on this assumption of an inversion in the epic’s outlook and plan, Holtzmann proposed certain characteristic distinctions between the Germanic and Brahmanic outlooks:

1. Whereas the old epic was essentially a “warlike heroic legend,” the newer epic would have been the product of “priestly revision.”¹⁸
2. The old epic embodied “simple, crude ethics,” but these ethics underwent a “later refinement” in the course of its transition from a heroic epic to a Brahmanic philosophical and ritual text.¹⁹
3. In contrast to the “true poetry” of the former, the latter was characterized by “mystical babbling.”²⁰
4. Finally, in contrast to the “noble temperament” of the Indo-Germanic warriors, Holtzmann found “dulled superstition” to be the defining characteristic of the later, Brahman-dominated period.²¹

As we saw in the preceding chapter, Holtzmann frequently invoked comparisons between the Germanic warriors described by Tacitus and the *Mahābhārata* warriors, often embellishing them with Latin quotes. He took literary descriptions of violence or cruelty to be evidence of a common epic tradition. In a number of cases, he also identified these archaic customs or values with Āryan origins. For instance, he noted that when the “princes of the *Saindhava*” attacked Arjuna in battle they “praise[d] their names, their lineage, and their manifold deeds 14, 77. 6 = 2226.” From this, he concluded that “it is the *Saindhava* who, as compared to the other Aryans, have preserved the old customs.”²² In his concrete analyses of the epic, Holtzmann relied especially on four hypotheses: (1) the hypothesis of bardic composition; (2) the hypothesis of the *Mahābhārata* as a Kṣatriya text; (3) the hypothesis of a tension between the epic’s historical elements (pertaining to an actual war) and its later mythic and/or didactic additions; and (4) the hypothesis of a Brahmanic takeover of the text in the course of which the Brahmans introduced their ritual, philosophy and religion into the text. As these hypotheses become a mainstay of Western *Mahābhārata* scholarship after Holtzmann, it is as well to take a look at their origins in the work of Holtzmann. We first summarize his main statements regarding each hypothesis:

17. Holtzmann Jr., *Zur Geschichte und Kritik*, 11.

18. *Ibid.*, 9.

19. *Ibid.*

20. *Ibid.*

21. *Ibid.*

22. *Ibid.*, 51.

1. Bardic hypothesis

Epic poetry among the Indians is as old as every other [poetry]; its preservation and development took place at the court of the kings through the activity of a specific bardic class; it [i.e., the epic tradition] propagated itself through the oral tradition.²³

Insofar as the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* indisputably demonstrate a great confidence in narration and a firmly developed technique of presentation, this perception resonates completely with our supposition that already long before the first composition of these poems, warlike heroic poetry was being developed at the courts of the kings.²⁴

The narrator of the *Mahābhārata* in our redaction is a scholarly Brahman, but this feature does not belong to the older period, and next to *Vaiṣampāyana*, the Brahman, appear as narrators two warriors, *Sanjaya* and *Ugraçravas*.²⁵

Accordingly, there must have existed a *specific bardic class* at the courts of the kings, which was charged with the care of preserving of the epic....²⁶

The means of preserving and expanding this courtly poetry was the *oral tradition*.²⁷

2. Kṣatriya hypothesis

The *origin of epic poetry* is, as was noted above, located by the Indians themselves in the earliest antiquity; alongside the first king stood the first bards, who sang of his virtues and deeds. Thus, the epic is rooted, according to the belief of the Indians themselves, not in allegory but in history.²⁸

The care of this mythology, however, is a matter for the warriors; it is not in the huts of the hermits but in the courts of the kings that we have to seek the blossom of this epic and of epic mythology; the gods of the warriors, says the *Vāsishtasmṛiti* (Max Müller anc. litt. S. 55), are *Soma*, *Sūrya*, and the others, thus, precisely the old gods, whereas *Nārāyaṇa* is ascribed to the Brahmins and *Rudra* declared to be the god of the *Çudras*.²⁹

The epic had nothing to do with the religious literature of the Brahmins, as it is represented in the *Veda*; it was the property of the warrior caste.³⁰

*For the old epic poetry is the property of the warrior caste.*³¹

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid., 58.

25. Ibid., 52.

26. Ibid., 54 (Holtzmann's emphasis).

27. Ibid., 59 (Holtzmann's emphasis).

28. Ibid., 56.

29. Ibid., 41.

30. Ibid., 51.

31. Ibid., 57 (emphasis in original).

3. War narrative hypothesis

He [the poet] shows us the tragic struggle of two principles—of knighthood, whose time is over, and of the newly arising politics—and presents the former to us in all the glory of a setting sun.³²

With rising interest, we see how the old honest battle-ethics of the knights after a brave defense succumb to treason and deceit.³³

The contrast of the forces that collide with each other here is tragic: on the one side stands the old, bold heroic order, which only knows an open, honest battle, and whose sole pole-star is the fame that is praised in enthusiastic verses, which in proud confidence of its own power scorns all calculations of pragmatic reason. . . . In lively contrast, we see on the other side the clever and scheming art of a *Kṛṣṇa*, who, himself no warrior, knows how to arm brave heroes for his own purposes through sophistic eloquence. His enterprise is victorious, *victrix causa diis placuit sed victa poëtae [sic]*.³⁴

4. Brahmanic hypothesis

However every change in religious outlook brought about the greatest upheaval in the old legendary materials; the old legends were altered even more fundamentally in favor of a new, rising god than in favor of a new dynasty; we can still follow such an example step-for-step in the *Mahābhārata*, the transformation of the old epic by the servants and worshippers of *Vishṇu*.³⁵

The victory of the Brahmanic system forced epic poetry ever further back; to the Brahmans every view that was in some way historical was questionable.³⁶

Vishnuism corrupted the entire poem, especially through the monstrous identification of *Vishṇu* with *Kṛṣṇa*.³⁷

Each of these four principles provided Holtzmann an element of his argument. Working in concert, they allowed him to defend the idea of an Indo-Germanic epic even against all available evidence. For instance, he used the bardic hypothesis to defend the idea of a heroic epic tradition. But since the *Mahābhārata* did not actually conform to the canons of heroic epic postulated by him, he invoked the Brahmanic hypothesis to explain why it deviated from these canons. Likewise, he invoked the war narrative hypothesis to claim that the original epic revolved around the conflict between the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas and that everything outside of the central war books was a Brahmanic interpolation. The Brahmanic hypothesis in turn allowed

32. *Ibid.*, 89.

33. *Ibid.*

34. *Ibid.*, 90.

35. *Ibid.*, 57.

36. *Ibid.*, 66.

37. *Ibid.*, 10.

him to justify his interventions in the text, as it had also for his uncle before him, Adolf Holtzmann Sr. Even though the bardic hypothesis implied an epic tradition rather than a single composition, vitiating his claim that the Brahmins had corrupted the epic, by invoking the Kṣatriya hypothesis he could claim that in spite of the variation between individual bardic compositions there was sufficient homogeneity among them to justify speaking of a single epic. Thus, while individual poets might have innovated (for instance, adapting older materials to praise their respective patrons), Holtzmann thought their common origins in a heroic culture would have imposed a certain continuity on these various compositions. Bards and kings, as he reminds us, shared a certain way of life. The bards were “not even missing in war”; we “find them during the great battle in the army camp of the two hostile kings.” Indeed Holtzmann claimed that “they themselves enter[ed] battle in order to be able to see for themselves the heroic deeds of the warriors and to then be able to sing of them....”³⁸ In effect, the bardic tradition held together because it was rooted in the same world. In contrast, when the Brahmins entered upon the scene, they destroyed the heroic culture of the Germans. Thus, when Holtzmann spoke of the Brahmins corrupting the epic, he meant this in a literal sense: not only did they introduce new materials into the epic but they also corrupted the values that made up the old epic tradition.

IDEAS OF EPIC COMPOSITION

As we have seen, even though Holtzmann spoke of *an* Indo-Germanic epic, he had in mind not one epic, but an epic tradition comprising manifold narratives. As he used the expression “Indo-Germanic original epic [Indo-Germanisches Urepos],” he seems, rather, to refer to a shared Indo-Germanic culture. Indeed, after chapter 6 (where he first introduced the hypothesis of an Indo-Germanic epic), Holtzmann abandoned the search for a textual archetype, focusing instead on the characteristic features that would define Indo-Germanic culture. Among the terms that played a major role in his discussion were “Lebensanschauung” (view of life), “Sitten” (customs), and “gesellschaftlich[e] Einrichtungen” (social structures).³⁹ Holtzmann used all these to try to define the culture or tradition of the “Germans.” In contrast, he never took up the search for a textual archetype again in the remainder of the book.⁴⁰ Rather, his main interest thereafter was in bringing to life again his hypothetical Indo-Germans.

However, this focus on an epic tradition rather than an epic text created certain problems for his narrative. Even if we grant his argument that the Brahmins were

38. Ibid., 54.

39. Ibid., 45.

40. In his words: “we shall set aside the question of whether there is a relationship between the Indian and the German epic in terms of the contents, the legendary materials themselves. Instead, *we shall only ask whether in the oldest parts of the Mahābhārata we find characteristic traits in worldview, customs, and social structures, which we also encounter in the oldest reports about the Germans.*” Ibid. (italics ours).

responsible for the decline of the heroic tradition, this is not the same as a revision of the epic. It remains unclear what the relation of social changes to textual corruption is: did the Brahmins first seize political control over the warriors and so bring about changes in their narratives? Or did they first seize control of the epic and use it as an instrument of social control? Further, since he held that “bardic poetry was not held together by an intellectual band; [rather,] the thread that ran through its transmission was only a chronological [one], the narrative followed the genealogy of the princely houses,”⁴¹ it is unclear how the Brahmins could have corrupted the old epic when it did not exist as a unified work. Holtzmann also noted: “from father to son and to grandson and then many generations further down was narrated the fate of the dynasty, whereby naturally depending upon the sympathies and the antipathies of the ruling lineages the standpoint of the poets too repeatedly changed.”⁴² But in that case, it makes little sense to claim that the Brahmins made changes to an oral epic tradition, since this tradition itself was constantly changing.

Holtzmann was clearly aware of the problem. As he noted, “the further and further expanded and altered legend could not take on a firm poetic form [Gestalt]; we can hence for the time of the prehistory of the *Mahābhārata* at most count on finding occasional references to unordered legendary materials of our poem in the contemporaneous Vedic literature, without the form [now] present to us being recognizable there [i.e., in the Vedic literature].”⁴³ But if the original epic had neither a textual archetype nor written records, how could any reliable claims be made of it? According to Holtzmann, it was lacking even in a definite oral form (*Gestalt*) or a single dominant legend (he introduced the Siegfried legend as one such contender but ultimately rejected this possibility). In that case, even the criterion of a “cruel crudeness of passion” identified by Holtzmann as the hallmark of the ancient Germans, cannot bring us further, since there was strictly speaking no text that could have survived into the Brahmanic *Mahābhārata*. Partly in order to resolve these difficulties and partly in order to posit an “Enlightenment” for the ancient Indo-Germans, Holtzmann in chapter 8 introduced the thesis of a poetic composition. According to him, a “genial poet” would have “extracted a single narrative from the legendary materials present [to him]” and “refashioned” it “to an independent artistic composition, to the *Mahābhārata* (according to its oldest form).”⁴⁴ Even though he conceded that “the transition from the old professional poetry to the artificial epic [Kunstepos] led to a wide gap, which only a true poetic genius was capable of filling,”⁴⁵ he seems to have thought there was a way of resolving the conflicting imperatives of upholding an oral bardic tradition (necessitated by his bardic hypothesis) and simultaneously

41. Ibid., 67.

42. Ibid., 68.

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid., 67.

45. Ibid., 67 (emphasis in original). The prefix *Kunst-* can mean both “art” and “artifice,” with the latter sense of an artificial, conscious creation predominating here over the aesthetic meaning.

claiming some kind of textual source (as required for his Brahmanic hypothesis). Writes Holtzmann:

How do we, however, come from this epic bardic poetry to a great epic arranged according to a [definite] plan, such as is present to us in the old *Mahābhārata*? The question arises whether a true poet also stood at the head of the Indian epic, who, out of the mass of legends handed down, placed a particularly outstanding [example] in the center, artistically grouped others in the form of episodes around this [one], sharply delineated the characters and let them collide against each other in a tragic conflict, arranged the events next to each other in a well-thought-out sequence from the first beginnings of the strife down to the horrific catastrophe, and carried a single leading and cohesive thought through the artistically and logically structured whole; in other words, whether the old epic transmission found a poet of the first order, a Homer, who impressed the stamp of his genius, once for all, upon it?⁴⁶

By invoking his uncle's theory of Homeric composition (in 1854, the elder Holtzmann had proposed that central figures whom he called *samāsas* would have retained "an overview over the entire epic" while subordinate figures called *vjāsas* would have been responsible for presenting the epic "presented in song in explicit detail"⁴⁷), Holtzmann Jr. sought to account for the transformation of the *Mahābhārata* from an oral Indo-Germanic epic tradition to a written composition. Like his uncle, he made a distinction between individual legends preserved by the bardic tradition and an overarching plan as constructed by a "genial poet." But whereas Holtzmann Sr. had postulated a personification of the *vjāsas* to Vyāsa (the traditional author of the epic), Holtzmann Jr. seems to have seen the so-called arrangers of the epic tradition, the *samāsas*, as the key figures in this process. Rather than seeing Vyāsa as the composer, he seems to have imagined a *samāsa* (an Indian Homer, as he explicitly called him) who selected a particular *vjāsa*, placed it at the core of his poem, and then artistically arranged other *vjāsas* around it to obtain a single composition. Following this discussion of the composition of the epic, in chapter 12 Holtzmann introduced the suggestion that the original poet of the *Mahābhārata* would have been a Buddhist poet. As he put it, "if we suppose that our epic in its earliest artistic form [Gestalt] was the work of a Buddhist poet, then it is understandable that the strict Brahmanic revisers displaced *Duryodhana's* faction, especially *Karṇa*, the poet's favorite hero; in the same measure, *Kṛṣṇa's* faction had to be glorified, as soon as one started to bring this into connection with *Vishṇu*."⁴⁸ With this, Holtzmann brought forward the Indo-Germanic epic hypothesis into the horizon of his theological and religious concerns. As noted earlier, one of his motivations for positing a poetic composition was to highlight a development among the ancient Indo-Germans in the direction of an Enlightenment. In order to do so, Holtzmann found it most convenient to associate

46. Ibid., 68.

47. Holtzmann Sr., *Untersuchungen ueber das Nibelungenlied*, 163–64.

48. Holtzmann Jr., *Zur Geschichte und Kritik*, 94.

the Indo-Germans warriors with ancient Buddhists. Even though the introduction of the Buddhist hypothesis complicated the picture of an old Indo-Germanic epic with heroic elements and a later Brahmanic revision, it was a key element in his narrative of Germanic identity. Holtzmann had already accounted for the Brahmins' resentment of the Indo-Germans in terms of the contrast between the heroic, noble, and free-thinking outlook of the former and the cowardly, dishonest, and manipulative outlook of the latter. However, the introduction of the Buddhist composition also allowed him to characterize their resentment in terms of a religious opposition.

IDEAS OF RELIGIOUS CONFLICT

Although Holtzmann initially set out to identify the characteristics of the ancient Germanic peoples, this project, surprisingly enough, also required a characterization of Germany's Protestant inheritance vis-à-vis its Catholic past. For reasons we shall see later, Holtzmann was obsessed with the idea of religious conflict. He read the *Mahābhārata* as primarily a record of various religious conflicts. Even though he initially did not make it explicit, he considered the Brahmanic takeover of the Indo-Germanic epic itself to be the first stage of a protracted conflict, one that continued via Buddhism until the final triumph of Brahmanism around the eighth century CE. He noted of the epic that "political and dynastic interests" alone could not explain the complete reversal in its sympathies:

But political and dynastic interests alone cannot explain such an unusual falsification, as is the case here. In a period of the political division of the country into multiple, often mutually hostile regions, no dynastic interest suffices to motivate such a systematic and laborious, albeit also frequently incompetent and inconsequently performed, falsification, such animosity against the old heroic figures of the ancestral period, as played a role in the revision of the *Mahābhārata*.⁴⁹

Instead, he proposed that "in the case of such a people [i.e., the Indians]" a different and "much more powerful motivation" had to be sought, namely "religious fanaticism [religiöser Fanatismus]." "Indian history," he claimed, "is, in the first place, religious history [Religionsgeschichte]; it circles around fundamental principles and questions of metaphysics and provides us with one of the most pertinent proofs of the strength and ineradicability of metaphysical need in the human heart." As such, he argued, "the reason for this revision" had to be sought "in a religious agenda, and, specifically, in such [an agenda] as was common to the Brahmins of all lands and all factions."⁵⁰ Even though the revisionistic tendencies of the Brahmins were, at least in Holtzmann's original narrative, directed against the Indo-Germanic oral epic, for practical reasons they could only undertake such a revision once a text became available in the form of the Buddhist poetic composition. The theory of a religious conflict

49. *Ibid.*, 96.

50. *Ibid.*

between Buddhists and Brahmins was especially suited to explaining why the latter might have undertaken such a revision. Writes Holtzmann:

Around the time of the beginning of our calendar, the hard and bloody battle seems to have gotten underway, in whose course the resurrected Brahmanism finally became master over its dangerous foe. One appears now to be fairly univocally in agreement that one must locate the bloom of Buddhism in the centuries 300 BC till 500 AD, the final victory of Brahmanism in the period 800 to 1000. Unfortunately, we still do not have any coherent detailed presentation of this violent war of religion. But it will suffice for a general characterization of it when only the well known verse were preserved to us: "Whoever, from the bridge (of *Rāma*, which leads to Ceylon) till the snowy mountains, does not kill the followers of the *Buddha*, children as much as old men, must [himself] be killed, thus has the king commanded his servants." The verse is taken from the bizarre poem *Çaṅkaravijaya*, that is, the victorious march of *Çiva* [Śiva], cf. Gildemeisters *Chrestomathie* 1868 p. XII and p. 92 v. 66. Here, the speaker of the Brahmins, *Kumārila*, first defeats the Buddhists in a disputation at the court of king *Sudhanvan*, then in performing miracles, in the last case with the help of *Vishṇu*. Thereupon, *Sudhanvan* gives the order to kill all Buddhists; for, he says, great-hearted men may not spare even their friends, when they have sinned; *Rāma*, the son of *Jamadagni*, too, killed his own mother. Incidentally, the course of the gigantic battle can be a matter of indifference to us here; its result at any rate remains firm. Buddhism was violently exterminated in those areas where it had blossomed for centuries. The causes are clear: on the one hand, a violent effort, an energetic Counter-Reformation of the Brahmins, which, through its adoption of the folk-gods especially the beloved *Vishṇu-Kṛṣṇa*, and of the entire folk-superstition, had won over the masses for itself, and, on the other hand, a degeneracy that had entered into Buddhism, in that it had already quite early deviated from its original tendency.⁵¹

As in the first part of his text, where he saw the *Mahābhārata* as a proxy for a religious and spiritual struggle (between the Brahmins and the Germans), here too he argued that the *Mahābhārata* was a key element in the battle between Buddhists and Brahmins. According to him,

Soon after the beginning of the great battle between Brahmanism and Buddhism the Brahmins reworked the poem for their [own] purposes and contrasted a new orthodox [rechtgläubige] redaction of the same [i.e., of the poem] to it. This [version] distinguished itself from the old [poem] through the glorification of the *Pāṇḍava* and the demotion of the *Kaurava*, through the influx of *Vishṇu* and the deification of *Kṛṣṇa*, through the emphasis on orthodox [orthodoxen] Brahmanism. This first Brahmanic redaction was still hostile toward *Çiva* [Śiva].⁵²

51. Ibid., 97–98.

52. Ibid., 128.

However, the Brahmins were not able to fight Buddhism successfully on their own. Instead, they were forced into an alliance with the rising cult of Kṛṣṇa, explaining why the central deity of the epic is the god Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa.

The religious ideas that dominated the poem [i.e., a combination of Indo-Germanic pantheism coexisting alongside Buddhism] suffered a complete revolution through the introduction of *Vishnuism*. The tribes of the *Andhaka*, *Vṛshṇi*, *Sātavata* worshipped *Vāsudeva*, probably a deified tribal hero.... A religion attached itself to his worship, which [religion] penetrated wide sections of India; a religion of warriors, who knew to narrate much about the deeds of their god....⁵³

Of this composite Brahmanic and folk god, Holtzmann argued that “his adventures throughout do not bear the stamp of the old heroic legend; *Vāsudeva* is not a knightly champion; he demonstrates more cunning and deceit than actual bravery; he himself, like his relatives and the quarrelsome pastoral race that follows him, appears to have a strong tendency to drunkenness and luxuriousness, to gambling and sensuous love-making.” Holtzmann conceded that the tribe of the Vṛṣṇis (Kṛṣṇa’s people in the epic) was “not a strictly Brahmanic race” and their worship “not a Brahmanic religion.” The tribes “that worshipped *Vāsudeva*,” he wrote, “the *Yādava* do not belong to the race of the center; their tribal father *Yadu*, in the very old legend of *Yayāti*, is cursed and disinherited by this his own father.” However, he explained the fact that the Brahmins entered into an alliance with such a marginal tribe on the grounds that, “as the Brahmins looked around for allies for the great battle against the Buddhists, they had to attempt to win the worshippers of *Vāsudeva* for themselves.” According to him, in order to gain the sympathies of Kṛṣṇa’s followers, the Brahmins undertook to “fus[e]” their god “*Vāsudeva* with *Nārāyaṇa*, who in the meantime had risen in the Brahmanic world, the god of the primal waters, of the water of creation (Weber Ind. Stud. IX 2), a somewhat older form of *Vishṇu*.”⁵⁴ Thereafter, “both [gods], *Vāsudeva* and *Nārāyaṇa*, further blended themselves with *Vishṇu*, an old sun god who, already in the *Veda*, is not insignificant, [and] who now through his association with the popular *Vāsudeva* and the pantheistic *Nārāyaṇa* was raised to the highest god....” In a third and final stage that was “still more important for the formation [Gestaltung] of the epic,” argued Holtzmann, there then occurred a “fatal identification of the epic *Kṛṣṇa* with the warrior-like *Vāsudeva* of the *Yādava*.” Kṛṣṇa, he claimed, was not a Vedic deity. His antecedents appeared, rather, to lie in the old Indo-Germanic epic: “The epic knew of a *Kṛṣṇa*, who was accorded a very important role, a leader of a pastoral race allied with the *Pāṇḍava*, who, however, never appears as a warrior (he never fights alongside the others, he only steers *Arjuna*’s chariot), but as a scheming politician, whose faithless recommendations run counter to the old concepts of knightly honor the *Pāṇḍavas* carry out and thereby attain victory.” According to Holtzmann, the fact that “*Kṛṣṇa* was one of the many names of *Vāsudeva* of the *Yādavas*” inspired the Brahmins, “more out of political as religious reasons,”

53. Ibid., 131 (Holtzmann’s emphasis).

54. Ibid.

to identify not only “their [god] *Vishṇu* [who was] legitimated by the Vedas” with *Kṛṣṇa*, but also the *Kṛṣṇa* of the Yādavas, in turn, with the *Kṛṣṇa* of the epic. “Thus, the decisive [and] fatal step for the *Mahābhārata* took place: the plotter of the piece was raised to a hero, indeed to a god, and *Kṛṣṇa* was declared to be identical with *Vāsudeva* and *Vishṇu*. The consequence was a total alteration of the poem which placed the old attitude therefore so to speak on its head.”⁵⁵

Although designed to account for the complexity of *Kṛṣṇa*’s presentation in the epic, Holtzmann’s theory of three *Kṛṣṇas*—an epic *Kṛṣṇa* known for his disregard of the heroic code, a folk *Kṛṣṇa* who was the chieftain of the *Vṛṣṇi* or Yādava tribes, and a Brahmanic *Kṛṣṇa* formed through the identification of the Brahmanic god *Viṣṇu* with the deified tribal hero *Kṛṣṇa*—was not without its problems. Why should the old epic have known of a character called *Kṛṣṇa*, if, as Holtzmann claimed, it was the product of a heroic oral bardic tradition? If the original epic consisted of bardic compositions in praise of Indo-Germanic warriors, as Holtzmann explicitly claimed, why would they have introduced a character like *Kṛṣṇa*? Further, if this epic had been composed, as Holtzmann also suggested, prior to contact with non-Āryan or Brahmanic civilization, how could they have been acquainted with the name *Kṛṣṇa*? *Kṛṣṇa*, Holtzmann at other times suggested, was a Brahmanic character. But if so, why would they have introduced one of their own into the epic in a negative light? Further, if *Kṛṣṇa* was a Brahmanic innovation, he could not have been introduced into the epic until after the beginning of their religious rivalry with the Buddhists. Indeed, as Holtzmann told it, two further processes had to take place before the Brahmins could introduce *Kṛṣṇa* into the text as an element of their political strategy against the Buddhists: first, *Kṛṣṇa* had to undergo identification with *Nārāyaṇa*; thereafter, this composite being *Kṛṣṇa-Nārāyaṇa* had to undergo identification with *Viṣṇu*. Holtzmann argued that the homonymy between the Brahmanic-folk *Kṛṣṇa* and the epic *Kṛṣṇa* would have prompted the Brahmins to identify their deity with the epic character. But in that case, what agency was behind the epic *Kṛṣṇa*? Could it be that the Indo-Germanic bards, anticipating their eventual decline, had already created the character as a kind of template for a Brahmanic *Kṛṣṇa* to come?

Holtzmann did not address these basic confusions. On the contrary, he insisted that his theory of three *Kṛṣṇas* was best able to account for the complexity of *Kṛṣṇa*’s presentation in the epic. As he told it, “while such completely new ideas forced their way into the poem, the old narration in its basic traits asserted itself too firmly in the memory of its surrounding world for it to be given up, so to speak; [thus] it could not be avoided that *different views about Kṛṣṇa-Vishṇu* attained currency one after and next to one another in our poem.”⁵⁶ Therefore, he argued, “at one time *Kṛṣṇa* is a mere human, at another time he is an incarnation of *Vishṇu*, at yet another, *Vishṇu* himself. The latter has already attained supremacy in most passages, in others he is still clearly subordinate to the old gods *Indra* and *Brahman*.”⁵⁷ Further, citing the views of Wilson and Burnouf, he argued that only a theory of the gradual apotheosis of an

55. Ibid., 132.

56. Ibid., 132–33 (Holtzmann’s emphasis).

57. Ibid., 133.

epic hero to a Brahmanic divinity could account for the fact of the gradual evolution of Kṛṣṇa's character in the epic:

In other places, the divine nature of *Kṛṣṇa* is less decidedly affirmed; in some, it is disputed or denied; and, in most of the situations in which he is exhibited in action, it is as a prince and warrior, not as a divinity. He exercises no superhuman faculties in the defence of himself or his friends, or in the defeat and destruction of his foes." [Holtzmann citing Wilson *Vish. P. Einl.* p. 15; Holtzmann now continues:] Even in the current redaction of the poem the apotheosis of *Kṛṣṇa* is made plausible to the reader gradually with a certain caution; at first he appears as a mere man, then first from 1, 224, 8 = 8160 onwards he is declared to be identical with *Nārāyaṇa* (*Brahman* must instruct *Agni* about this, to whom it is obviously new[s]), then *Indra* 3, 47, 13 = 1891 discovers that *Nārāyaṇa* is the same as *Vishṇu*. Both names, *Nārāyaṇa* and *Vishṇu*, are used alternately as a description of the same god 3, 101, 9 = 8722 among others. That the supremacy of *Vishṇu* was a new idea to which contemporaries only slowly and hesitantly accustomed themselves is shown by the speeches of the old gods, which, so to speak, introduce and present [him] and the remarks about the bad people who do not want to believe in the divinity of *Vishṇu*. Thus 6, 66, 3 = 2975 the amazed gods ask *Brahman* [*Brahmā*?] what sort of god he [i.e., *Viṣṇu*] is, to whom he has just prayed, and *Brahman* teaches them in detail about the person and essence of *Vishṇu*.... Many passages complain about people who deny the divinity of *Vishṇu*, especially 6, 66, 18 = 2990 much is said about such [people]. The *Vishṇu* of the epic who has been raised in this manner to the highest god is very different from that of the old poets of the hymns "le *Vishṇu* des *Vēdas* n'est en aucune manière le *Vishṇu* des mythographes" Burnouf *Bh. P. III Einl.* p. 22.⁵⁸

Although weak in the details, Holtzmann was clearly invoking a theory of epic composition that had widespread appeal for most Western scholars. What could be more self-evident than that the Brahmins, always jealous of their privilege and seeking to exercise still greater control over the minds of the populace, would have conspired to take over the *Mahābhārata*, the most important text of noble Kṣatriya warriors? What could be more self-evident than that they would have done so by assimilating their gods to folk deities? What could be more self-evident than their introducing their theological and philosophical doctrines only gradually into the text, skillfully weaving them into existing oral epic materials? The story Western scholars told of the *Mahābhārata* was one of progressive corruption, where corruption did not simply imply the conflation of two textual sources but, rather, the infiltration of non-Āryan ideas into Āryan civilization.⁵⁹

58. Ibid.

59. For the continued prevalence of this trope in contemporary scholarship, see the works of Fitzgerald, cited earlier. See especially his "The Great Epic of India," where he claims that "the pernicious fragmentation of the Kṣatriya order is presented in the *Great Bhārata* primarily in terms of the dissolution and polarization of the preeminent royal family of the ancient Aryan heartland of North Central India." Fitzgerald, "The Great Epic of India as Religious Rhetoric," 619. Fitzgerald, however, shies away from identifying Brahmins with non-Āryan, Dravidian culture, reverting rather to the Lassenian view.

IDEAS OF TEXTUAL CORRUPTION

A look at Mahābhārata criticism as it developed in Holtzmann's *Zur Geschichte und Kritik* bears out just how central the narrative of corruption was to the Western reception of the text. Even though the theory of a Brahmanic takeover of a Kṣatriya epic can be traced back to the work of Lassen and Goldstücker, it is Holtzmann who first developed a comprehensive account of the mechanisms of this takeover. First, he charged that the Brahmins introduced new characters and transformed the content of the narratives:

The poem was corrupted in the first Brahmanic redaction through *the preferential treatment* of the Pāṇḍavas, primarily of Arjuna, the loyal friend of the deified Kṛṣṇa, the tribal father, and furthermore of his brothers, relatives, and friends [the reference is to the “preferential treatment” accorded the Pāṇḍavas in the new redaction]. The five brothers were presented as perfect ideals of Brahmanic kings and slaves of the priests, Arjuna made as much like the Brahmanic Rāma (the son of Daśaratha) as possible, Kṛṣṇa, even where he only appears as a human, presented as a picture of virtue and his wickedness whitewashed through massive sophistry.⁶⁰

Second, he charged that the Brahmins also transformed the ethical outlook of the poem. As he put it, the central purpose of the Brahmanic revision was to undertake an “*adaptation to the spirit of Brahmanism*,” which entailed showing that the social order of the Brahmins existed as a matter of right since time immemorial:

Not only the course of the poem, the evaluation of the main figures, [and] the dominant system of mythology in it had to be changed in this revision, but an *adaptation to the spirit of Brahmanism* had to be carried out as well, specifically, the social and communitarian conditions corresponding to the priestly worldview had to be presented as already extant in remote antiquity, indeed as present from the beginning of human society, and as existing as a matter of right.⁶¹

Holtzmann also raised three more specific criticisms of the Brahmins. First, he argued that the Brahmins were responsible for the repression of women. “All active involvement of women in the course of the action,” he claimed, “was reduced to a minimum because, according to the neo-Brahmanic view, only submissiveness and reclusivity were appropriate to women.”⁶² Second, he claimed that the Brahmins, not content with making changes to the epic, also actively conspired to seize political control from the Kṣatriya rulers of India (although the way they did so, again, was to introduce appropriate narratives into the Mahābhārata):

Furthermore, the kings of the prehistoric period were all outfitted with house priests (*purohita*), without whose advice and agreement they undertook no important

60. Holtzmann Jr., *Zur Geschichte und Kritik*, 134 (Holtzmann's emphasis).

61. *Ibid.*, 147 (emphasis in original).

62. *Ibid.*

steps, and no element is not utilized to prove the predominant role of the Brahmins already in the time of the distant forefathers; the greater the insolence with which the first caste behaves, the later or the more revised [ueberarbeiteter] is that respective piece of the *Mahābhārata*. In the priestly interest, people of the Brahmanic caste were inserted at every point into the narration, as, for example, the priest *Damana* in the *Nalopākhyāna* who aids the king in [gaining] progeny as *Rshyaçrīṅga* and others [aid] *Daçaratha* in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Alongside the gods on earth, the Brahmins, and *Vishṇu*, the old gods were actually superfluous; a number of passages which report their active involvement in the course of the action were left out or severely shortened: a most palpable and irreplaceable loss.⁶³

Finally, these changes to social customs and political structures could not but have an effect on the cultural, aesthetic and ethical values of the Indians. As Holtzmann described it, “just as the rationalism of the Brahmins corrupted the old mythology, so also could it only have a corrupting effect on poetry; wonder was considered childish and the agency of the old gods in the fates of the heroes was replaced by a naturalistic form of explanation.”⁶⁴ He was even harsher in his verdict on Indian moral life after Brahmanism:

Furthermore, how much Brahmanism with its sophistic approach damaged the old, healthy, and potentially further developable moral of the Indians and twisted their concepts of right and wrong—the oversubtle speeches of *Kṛṣṇa* and his followers are testimony thereof. In place of morals and religion entered ritual [Cereemoniendienst] and [the belief in] salvation through works [Werkheiligkeit] from the time of the Brahman Restoration [brahmanischen Restauration] down to our times.⁶⁵

The war with Buddhism was, in fact, fateful even for the victors [i.e., to the Brahmins]; [as a concession to] the loyal allies, the Vishnuites, one had to subtract something from the seriousness of the moral [code], as long as the privileges of the Brahmins and the authority of the *Veda* were maintained. As Weber (Ind. Stud. IX 120) remarks, one made the yoke as light as possible and demanded only subjection; indeed, for the followers of the sect of *Vishṇu* even sacrifice and learning is superfluous, confession of faith in *Vishṇu* suffices.⁶⁶

Holtzmann’s criticisms of the Brahmins were wideranging, but not always consistent. It seemed as though in his eagerness to blame the Brahmins for every social ill, he often forgot that he was dealing with an epic, a literary work that, in spite of Lassen’s best efforts, could not be read as a literal account of history. Further, he seems to not have always distinguished between interventions in the text and interventions in reality. For instance, after detailing the corruption to the Indians’ moral sense that took place following the Brahmins’ seizure of power, he returned

63. Ibid., 148.

64. Ibid.

65. Ibid., 148–49.

66. Ibid., 149.

to the theme of how the Brahmans had taken control of the Mahābhārata. Here he described in two long passages how Brahmanic changes to the text, especially the random insertion of passages, might have impaired the value system of the old epic:

The history of the negotiations that now follow between the Kaurava and the Pāṇḍavas is completely corrupted; instead of specific suggestions and advice, we only hear completely general moral observations and philosophical explications, which do not cohere in the least with the course of the narrative; the real history is hardly recognizable out of the individually scattered hints. Such utterly abruptly inserted pieces are only inserted in order to conceal a gap. When an Indian copies a manuscript and does not find it to be complete, he inserts pieces of other related works “in order to preserve the appearance of completeness” (Roth Katal. p. 9 n. 247); “leaves taken from some other book—precious mode of book making” complains Taylor Kat. II. 607 cf. 609. Entirely in the same manner, the revisionists [of the Mahābhārata inserted entire pieces in place of others [they had] excised. . . .⁶⁷

In the second passage, Holtzmann made it clear that he saw an explicit connection between the Mahābhārata’s textual history and a wider history of India:

With this first Brahmanic revision begins the *third period of the history of the Mahābhārata*, characterized by the conscious endeavor to bring the old poem into harmony with the strictly Brahmanic system although [this was] already altered by its assimilation to the folk religions, by their preference for the Pāṇḍavas and their nastiness toward *Duryodhana*. Since the second revision [i.e., counting the Buddhist composition now as the first revision] often had texts before it that contradicted each other in the details, which it sought to unify for better or worse, it is appropriate to suppose that during this third period different recensions of the Brahmanic epic were in circulation in different regions of India. That the revision was specially intended for the warrior caste, which since the beginning was greatly smitten with the epic, is very likely given the material and contents of the [revised] work.⁶⁸

Holtzmann’s articulation of the Mahābhārata’s textual history into three phases—Indo-Germanic oral epic tradition followed by a Buddhist poetic composition followed by a Brahmanic revision—has been extremely seductive for many Western scholars, who have followed him either in his critique of Brahmanism (James L. Fitzgerald) or his fantasies of a heroic epic culture (Kevin McGrath) or in his ideas of oral epic tradition (John L. Brockington). And yet, when we look more closely at Holtzmann’s

67. Ibid., 144. Incidentally, this myth continues in contemporary scholarship. Van Buitenen writes: “In essence, an Indian book consists of a number of loose leaves held together by two loose boards and tied by a piece of string running through one or two holes in the leaves and the boards. . . . A manuscript was a person’s private property. . . . It was his to do what as he pleased. If it pleased him to insert in his loose-leaf book a couple of leaves containing a variant version of one of the stories, he would do so without compunction. . . .” J. A. B. van Buitenen, “Introduction,” in *The Mahābhārata, vol. 1. The Book of the Beginning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), xxix.

68. Holtzmann Jr., *Zur Geschichte und Kritik*, 150.

arguments for the Brahmanic revision of a Kṣatriya epic, we find serious flaws in the argument. For instance, although initially imagined as *a* Brahmanic redaction, it now appears that this textual undertaking must have been multiple, scattered, and gotten underway at different times in different parts of India, for, if we read Holtzmann correctly, it seems that when the Brahmins got together to undertake their revision, they already had multiple redactions before them. In the first place, they were dealing not with *an* Indo-Germanic epic, but with an Indo-Germanic epic tradition. This tradition, moreover, was transmitted orally and itself kept shifting as bards composed new narratives and embellished or recast old ones. Holtzmann does partially resolve this problem by introducing the thesis of a Buddhist poetic composition. But even this offers only a partial solution, since it does not explain how the Brahmins then replaced all of the oral epic tradition. Even if they revised the Buddhist poetic composition, what of the other oral narratives in circulation?⁶⁹ Holtzmann also did not explain how or why the contents of the oral epic tradition, which after all was warlike and concerned with the deeds of Indo-Germanic heroes on the battlefield, could have survived unchanged into a Buddhist poetic composition. Surely, if we are to seek a change to the outlook of the original epic, it must be here at the juncture of the Indo-Germanic and Buddhist traditions?

But even if we grant Holtzmann that the Brahmins revised a single poetic composition and that, through this, they were able to corrupt or decimate the entire Indo-Germanic tradition, it is not clear exactly what this fabled “Urepos” was. Was it, as Holtzmann at times claimed, the inheritance of the three epic peoples, composed at a time when the three were not distinct races and lived in a common homeland? Or was it, as Holtzmann at other times suggested, a series of bardic compositions detailing individual conflicts and acts of heroism, without a single guiding principle? Or was it, as Holtzmann also claimed at yet other times, the work of a great Germanic poet, who wished to show the tragic conflict between his heroic age, an age that was slowly dying out, and the more unscrupulous values of a newer age? But in that case, the epic must have been composed at the very cusp of the Brahmanic ascendancy and not centuries before, as Holtzmann seemed to suggest. Crucially, it must then have been composed in India itself and not outside in the unnamed homeland of the three epic peoples. It would then be a new composition, composed for the express purpose of reflecting Germanic experiences on north Indian soil and

69. Holtzmann did offer a partial solution to the problem, by arguing that the Brahmins “collected the different redactions that had arisen in the course of centuries; the oft contradictory elements were combined to a whole; [but] if it was all too difficult to reconcile the nonidentical versions, one narrated the same story twice.” *Ibid.*, 179. But even this does not suffice to explain the mechanics of “Brahman redaction”: how does one collect oral narratives in such a way that the new authorized version replaces the oral tradition? How does placing all the available oral versions of a story within a written exemplar contribute in any way to their extermination? Surely, if anything, the more versions the Brahmins collected and included in their authoritative written text, the more they would have preserved the heroic oral epic? Their role would precisely have been that of preservers and collectors of ancient oral tradition rather than as the textual iconoclasts Holtzmann imagines them to be.

not, as Holtzmann had called it, an original “epic inheritance” of the three epic peoples.⁷⁰ In other words, was the “Urepos” sufficiently “Ur” or did it, in turn, have an “Urepos” behind it. And if so, what was the connection of these two *Urepen* (three, if we include the manifold bardic poems composed on the spot by bards following in the train of heroic kings)? Where were they composed and what was their central theme? It seems that the theme of the earliest of these *Urepen* would have been a glorious historical triumph, achieved at the time the original epic people entered into or settled in their original homeland, wherever this might have been. But the second composition was already a horse of a very different color, if Holtzmann is to be believed. It was no longer one grand conflict that stood at the center of the epic—indeed, the epic itself had fragmented into an epic *tradition*—but a series of smaller conflicts, battles fought between rival Indo-Germanic clans as they pursued poetic immortality and the heaven promised to the dying warrior on the battlefield. Here, the dominant tenor of the epic had shifted: it had now taken on quasi-religious, mystical tones as the dying warriors prepared for their final journey secure in the knowledge of the warriors’ heaven that awaited them. The third composition, again, was a different beast altogether: now, instead of the quasi-religious tones of the second, the dominant tenor now was an *Untergangspathos*, as the heroic Germanic warriors prepared for their inevitable downfall and disappearance. Describing the transition from the second to the third composition, Holtzmann writes that “the sharply delineated characteristics of the main heroes and agents of the epic reveal the hand of a single and significant poet; if we consider the uniform structure of the narrative as a whole and in individual details, we arrive each time at the same result. The series of accidental battle scenes, which he [i.e., the poet] found before himself, were turned by him into a poignant picture; he shows us the tragic struggle of two principles; of knighthood, whose time is over; and of the newly arising politics, and presents the former to us in all the glory of a setting sun.”⁷¹ And yet, even if some Germanic poet had put together the epic materials he found before him, rearranged them to reflect the evolving political situation, whereby the Germanic tribes now found themselves confronted with indigenous, non-Āryan tribes, that would not explain Holtzmann’s thesis of an *inversion* in the epic’s sympathies. If the epic poet had anyway intended to portray a Germanic civilization in the process of dissolution, what sense did it make to claim that the Brahmins, arriving newly triumphant on the scene, would have needed to undertake a revision of the poem? Surely, both compositions—the old and the new—would have been in agreement on this one point, that the heroic Germanic culture was defeated and on its way out, while Brahmanism was the wave of the future? How could a work—supposedly created to reflect the tragic decline of the heroic age—possess *Untergangspathos* if it denied the very *Untergang* that pathos depended upon?

When it came to his thesis of a second Brahmanic revision, Holtzmann’s argument was similarly riddled with holes. If, as he claimed, the second revision “often had texts before it that contradicted each other in the details” and that “different

70. Ibid., 43.

71. Ibid., 89.

recensions of the Brahmanic epic were in circulation in different regions of India,”⁷² how could the Brahmins have undertaken a single, collective revision? Did they bring all these extant versions to a single place in India where they then undertook their revision? Was the revised text then carried back to its places of origin? And finally, why should this revision in particular have been “specially intended for the warrior caste”? If Holtzmann’s reflections about the first Brahmanic revision are correct, then the heroic age was already in decline by this time. It seems Holtzmann imagined the first revision as being directed against Buddhism and perhaps as including a sop to folk religions such as the Kṛṣṇa cult. Hence, a second revision was required, targeting the warriors in particular. But in that case, Buddhist and Indo-Germanic elements must have been always clearly distinguished in the epic. If Brahmanic polemics against the former left the latter untouched (hence necessitating a second round of changes), then how does Holtzmann explain the fact that a Buddhist poet undertook to become the preserver and compiler of the Indo-Germanic tradition? Either he did not introduce any specifically Buddhist elements (or did so in a way indistinguishable from the Indo-Germanic elements) or the first Brahmanic revision would have taken care of its Indo-Germanic and Buddhist predecessors at a single stroke. Further, if the second revision was aimed principally at the warrior caste, why gather different versions of a Brahmanic text from different parts of India? Surely the point was not to send this new instrument of ideology back to Brahmin communities? Still more problematic, Holtzmann’s account failed to explain the continued existence, indeed, the transmutation of the heroic Germanic warriors into enlightened, tolerant and peace-loving Buddhists. Why were Brahmins seeking to radiate out a message, past some three centuries of Buddhist culture, to pockets of a Germanic warrior tradition that seemingly had survived (within?) this culture? And how did he account for the fact that the German poet had composed the epic on the very cusp of the Brahmanic ascendancy but the two were now suddenly separated by approximately three centuries of Buddhism? How could the poet have portrayed the “tragic struggle of two principles; of knighthood, whose time is over; and of the newly arising politics, and presents the former to us in all the glory of a setting sun,”⁷³ if for a long time between the two, the only new political or religious ideology had been Buddhism? Either he was, in addition to being a “single and significant poet,” also a powerful prophet, or the conflict Holtzmann was referring to had actually taken place between the Indo-Germanic tradition and Buddhism. Holtzmann could not plausibly claim that the poet was reporting on an actual conflict between the two, when they, in Holtzmann’s own account, were not contiguous traditions.

In spite of these difficulties, Holtzmann tenaciously defended his thesis of a Brahmanic takeover of a preexisting epic. Indeed, he explicitly imagined the revised text as an instrument of Brahmanic polemics in an ongoing conflict with the Buddhists:

It appears that the Brahmins, already at the beginning of the great battle during the restitution of the Brahmanic dynasties (around 300 BC...), brought out a

72. *Ibid.*, 150.

73. *Ibid.*, 89.

revised *Mahābhārata* onto the battle-field alongside [their] other weapons. A total transformation of the literary treasure already present [Holtzmann means the pre-Brahmanic, i.e., Buddhist literature], to the extent that it was not destined for extermination, was absolutely necessary as preparation for taking up the battle with Buddhism. The *Mahābhārata* too was made to undergo it [i.e., undergo such a transformation]; the tendency of the work was strictly Brahmanic, the attitude toward the non-Brahmanic members of the community was solely one of contempt, an attitude that was only capable of seeing in [the] *Buddha* a deceptive corrupter ("the deluder by illusion" *Vish. P. Wilson III* 206) and an enemy of the Vedas, who led [others] to eternal damnation. Later, following the[ir] complete victory over Buddhism, the Brahmins attempted to eliminate all memory of [the] *Buddha*; what could remind [people] of him and was not simply to be erased remained standing under the title of *Çiva* [Śiva].⁷⁴

Holtzmann also proposed a third redaction of the epic. Unlike his first Brahmanic revision directed against the Buddhists and the second Brahmanic revision directed against the warrior, he did not make it clear what the purpose of this redaction was other than to suggest it incorporated elements of Śaiva cosmology or philosophy into the text:

Following the victory achieved over Buddhism, the Brahmins subjected the entire epic literature to a general revision; the *Mahābhārata* was made as much like the Puranas as possible and these like the *Mahābhārata* ascribed to a common author *Vyāsa*. The hallmarks of this second revision are: reconciliation with *Çiva* [Śiva]; expansion of the narrative material through didactic sections; unusual expansion of the extent of the work; insolence of the Brahmins driven to a peak; heightening of Vishnuistic sectarianism and of the bias toward the *Pāṇḍava*. Like the content, the language and meter were finally fixed.⁷⁵

As with his theories of the first two revisions of the text, there were a number of problems with this idea of a third redaction. First, it shared the basic problem that it was unclear as to which text he was referring to: did the Brahmins revise a single exemplar or did they introduce Śaiva doctrines into all available manuscripts? If, as he suggested, the second Brahmanic revision had to contend with multiple versions of the text, it seemed likely that the third redaction also would have had to contend with different versions of the revised epic. However, Holtzmann did not provide a solution. He also remained silent on the question of whether the same group of Brahmins was involved in this redaction as the previous two revisions or whether it was a different group. It seemed that the first had been a group of Vaiṣṇava Brahmins, so it was unclear why they would now suddenly include Śaiva elements in their text. It was also unclear whom they were targeting with this redaction: was it their own Vaiṣṇava group or were they trying to appeal to Śaiva groups? Holtzmann also had no answer to the question of how such a composite text might have been received

74. *Ibid.*, 151.

75. *Ibid.*, 152.

amongst Vaiṣṇava circles: would they have accepted this new Śaiva text as their own? Might they not have rejected a Śaiva Mahābhārata in preference for the original? From Holtzmann's statements, it appears that he did not make any distinction between the two groups: for him, the point of the new redaction, as much as of the first two revisions, was to consolidate Brahmanic power. Thus, whereas he repeatedly lamented the loss and destruction of the Indo-Germanic culture at the first Brahmanic revision, we do not find any statements regarding the loss and destruction of Vaiṣṇava Brahman culture (if, indeed, he made a distinction between different groups of Brahmins) in the wake of the third Brahmanic redaction. Finally, he also left the distinction between a revision and a redaction unclear. It seems that he used the first term preferentially to describe a Brahmanic takeover of existing materials, especially since the German *Umarbeitung* has a sense of transformation or inversion in perspective. (The related *Uebersetzung*, in contrast, has the sense of a reworking or refashioning, but Holtzmann does not seem to make a programmatic distinction between the two.) In contrast, by *redaction* (*Redaction*) he appears to have intended only the insertion and rearrangement of materials, without a transfer of textual authority. But this distinction only further underscored the fact that he was treating all Brahmanic groups alike and that he had not sufficiently thematized the kinds of textual processes he thought to be at work in the Mahābhārata's evolution. In fact, what he meant in both cases was not so much a textual evolution as different kinds of historical falsifications, which he thought had been introduced into history by the Brahmins' manipulation of texts such as the Mahābhārata. It was to counter these distortions that he ultimately entered the Mahābhārata debate.

IDEAS OF HISTORICAL DISTORTION

Although the Indian epic stood at the center of Holtzmann's book, it was clear from his reflections that his main concern was not to present an account of the Mahābhārata, but of Brahmanism in general. As with the works of the British historians John Holwell and Charles Grant,⁷⁶ Holtzmann's book was in fact a contribution to the genre of Orientalist accounts of the society and morals of the Hindus. Like the works of his predecessors, his book also pursued a political agenda through its negative portrayals of Brahmins. And, as in the case of Holwell and Grant, the thesis of a Brahmanic falsification of history was a major component of his arguments for critical oversight of the tradition. Holtzmann made four charges in particular against the Brahmins:

1. "The Indians have not just neglected their historical science, but intentionally obscured and falsified it."⁷⁷

76. See John Zephaniah Holwell, *A Review of the Original Principles, Religious and Moral, of the Ancient Bramins: Comprehending an Account of the Mythology, Cosmogony, Fasts, and Festivals, of the Gentoos, Followers of the Shastah* (London: Printed for T. Vernor, 1779) and Charles Grant, *Observations on the State of Society among the Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain, Particularly with Respect to Morals; and on the Means of Improving It* (London: 1792).

77. Holtzmann Jr., *Zur Geschichte und Kritik*, 95.

2. "All the corruption of history [Geschichtsverderbniss] of our Scholastics and Catholic priests is child's play compared to the systematic falsification and destruction of all history by the Brahmins."⁷⁸
3. "The Brahmins thereby eliminated all sense for the historical in their people, so that even European scholars received the impression that one could not speak of internal history and development in India but only of permanence and ossification."⁷⁹
4. "The greatest enemy of Brahmanism is the historical spirit. The Brahman declares [that] the world has always been the same and will [always] remain the same."⁸⁰

In the final chapter of his book, he then expanded these criticisms into a comprehensive theory of how the Brahmins would have corrupted the Mahābhārata:

Just before and during the expulsion of Buddhists a *general revision of the entire epic literature* took place, whose main goal was to make the different works, the *Mahābhārata*, the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and the *Purāṇa* conform to each other as much as possible. The tendency of this revision was that of leveling-down; the readers should get the impression that actually the same thing stands [i.e., is said] everywhere [i.e., in all texts everywhere]. The greatest enemy of Brahmanism is the historical spirit. The Brahman declares [that] the world has always been the same and will [always] remain the same.⁸¹

As Holtzmann saw it, Indian literature as a whole in all its manifestations suffered from Brahmanic corruption. There was no work that they had not infiltrated in some way with their doctrines, gods, or representations of social order and this was, for him, clearly a problem that needed to be combated:

78. Ibid., 96. Holtzmann lists Bunsen's letters to Max Müller as the source of the passage; the text is our translation of his German. In Bunsen's text, the word "child's play [Kinderspiel]" is emphasized; see the letter from April 23, 1856 in *Essays von Max Müller*, vol. 3, ed. and trans. Felix Liebrecht (Leipzig: Wilhelm Engelmann, 1872), 472. For an English translation, see Christian Karl Josias von Bunsen, "Letter to Max Müller, April 23, 1856," in *Chips from a German Workshop*, ed. Max Müller, vol. 3 (New York: Scribner, Armstrong, and Co., 1876), 459–60, but this translation is flawed. "Scholastiker" is not just "schoolteachers," but refers to the Scholastics. Likewise, "Pfaffen" is not just "priests," but refers to *Catholic* priests, the term having acquired the meaning of a derogatory term for them after Luther (see *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, s.v. "Pfaffen"). Also interesting in this context is Bunsen's remark: "I soon recognized that you [i.e., Müller] were *absolutely right* that the chronological investigations into Indian antiquity had led to nothing more certain than the conviction that the earlier views, with few exceptions, were either erroneous or unfounded. As soon as I arrived at this conviction, upon reading the best works on the subject (Lassen and Roth), I grew *furiously* in my spirit, as happens to me from time to time . . ." Christian Karl Josias von Bunsen, "Brief an Max Müller vom 17. Juli 1856," in *Essays von Max Müller*, vol. 3, ed. and trans. Felix Liebrecht (Leipzig: Wilhelm Engelmann, 1872), 484 (Bunsen's emphasis).

79. Holtzmann Jr., *Zur Geschichte und Kritik*, 104.

80. Ibid., 152–53.

81. Ibid., 152–53 (emphasis in original).

From the beginning onward, India [i.e., Indians] worshipped the Brahmans and *Vishṇu*; deification of the Brahmans and worship of *Vishṇu* also had to be taught to the same extent everywhere in the epic poetry, one set the number of the *Purāṇas* at eighteen; [and] one counted just as many books in the *Mahābhārata* and the great battle was stretched out to [fill] exactly as many days. The eighteen *Purāṇas* and the *Mahābhārata*, however, all have the same composer, *Vyāsa*; [and] hence eventual contradictions in them are only apparent; all these works have the same content. It is clear that *Vyāsa* is and means nothing other than the personification of the general revision of the entire epic literature (we ignore the *Veda* completely for the moment). Whatever of importance and significance stood in one work may not be lacking in the *Mahābhārata* and vice versa. Thus, all these works contain a section on the description of the world with lists of mountains, rivers, and peoples: these sections appear to have a common source, now lost. One of the main failures of the *Mahābhārata* seemed to be that it narrated too little about *Kṛṣṇa*; that is why accounts about his deeds and his divinity were extracted from puranic sources [and] scattered through the entire poem, and, as this appeared not to be enough, an appendix, the *Harivaṃśa*, was incorporated into the work [i.e., into the *Mahābhārata*]. Many pieces were taken out of the different *Purāṇas* and [inserted] into the *Mahābhārata* in a shortened form; thus in the third book the sections about *Skanda*; the lists of the pilgrimage sites in the third and the ninth [book]; and much about duty and law, sacrifice and the caste system in the thirteenth [book]. The intent of the Brahmans was fulfilled: the same thing stands in the *Mahābhārata* as in the *Purāṇa* and across wide stretches of the former the same tone of tediousness prevails, the same intellectual vapidness and thoughtlessness as in the latter. The *Rāmāyaṇa*, too, whose last Vishnuistic revision occurs in this period, was brought into the greatest possible accordance with the *Mahābhārata* and both [works] mutually borrow episodes and individual passages from each other.⁸²

Brahmanic corruption of texts, for Holtzmann, thus essentially manifested in three forms.

1. There was a disregard for genre and style, as these could contain clues to historical periods.
2. Brahmans also sought to confound the contexts of texts insofar as they contained references that could indicate historical details.
3. At a bibliographic and biographic level, they systematically combined and confused texts so as to give the impression of a single monolithic tradition.

As he saw it, the Brahmans one by one assimilated various texts into each other, imposed the same structure and the same divisions, copied passages from one text into another, and leveled out all distinctions. "The intent of the Brahmans was fulfilled," Holtzmann wrote. "The same thing stands in the *Mahābhārata* as in the *Purāṇa* and across wide stretches of the former the same tone of tediousness prevails,

82. Ibid., 153.

the same intellectual vapidness and thoughtlessness as in the latter.”⁸³ According to him, the pinnacle of Brahmanic corruption could be seen from the way they finally ascribed entire classes of literature (the eighteen Purāṇas, the four Vedas, and the Mahābhārata) to a Brahman, namely, Vyāsa. It is not clear whether, when Holtzmann spoke of Vyāsa, he meant a fictional character or a real person. At times, he speaks of Vyāsa being written into the epic, perhaps as a kind of cipher for the Brahmanic takeover of the text and it is clear that when he spoke of the eighteen Purāṇas, etc., being ascribed to Vyāsa, he meant a literary reference. At other times, he clearly thought Vyāsa was a historical personage, as, for instance, when he blamed him for the introduction of Brahmanic blood into the Indo-Germanic line. But in any case, Holtzmann took this threat emerging from Vyāsa quite seriously. A large part of his critical enterprise was dedicated to undoing the effects of Brahmanic corruption of the texts. This entailed not only the separation out of Brahmanic from non-Brahmanic sections, but also the writing out of Brahmins from the text.

The clearest statement of Holtzmann’s ideas of the various Brahmanic revisions of the epic and their underlying motivations can be found in this concluding chapter. He writes:

So that one could narrate [the story of] Vyāsa and his version of the *Mahābhārata*, the frame narrative of the older reworking of the snake sacrifice of king Janamejaya had now to be embedded in another story; so followed a *second enframing*. The current redaction recounts how *Ugraçravas*, the son of *Lomaharṣaṇa*, takes part in the *Naimisha* forest in a twelve-year-long sacrificial festival, and narrates the story of the snake sacrifice to the priests and observers there; in this story, *Vaiçampāyana* again presents the entire *Mahābhārata*. This enclosure is definitely puranic, for many *Purāṇas* are also narrated during the occasion of the *Naimisha*-sacrifice and the introduction in these agrees almost verbatim with the first verses of our *Mahābhārata* at present. Now, however, *Ugraçravas*, the speaker of the second revision is, according to the statements of the Indians themselves, a generation younger than *Vaiçampāyana*, the speaker of the first [revision]; not he, but his father *Lomaharṣaṇa* is a direct pupil of Vyāsa ... and also contemporaneous with *Vaiçampāyana* ... thus, the *Mahābhārata* recited at the time of the son is younger than that presented at the time of the father. More clearly than this, where it concerns history, an Indian cannot express himself. What sense does it make to highlight that the *Mahābhārata* was narrated twice, first during the snake sacrifice and then during the *Naimisha*-sacrifice, if one is to associate with this the message that it was entirely the same poem both times? Is not thereby indicated and excused the fact that the present recension, that of *Ugraçravas*, is a later revision of the older [revision] of *Vaiçampāyana*? What the latter recites is our first Brahmanic revision, what is narrated in the *Naimisha* forest is our second [revision], which thereby places the poem along the same lines as the *Purāṇa* first presented in the same forest at the same occasion.⁸⁴

83. Ibid.

84. Ibid., 155–56 (Holtzmann’s emphasis).

Here we see that for Holtzmann the essential principle of Brahmanic revision was to obscure historical events. Whereas the older epic had been a historical account and had involved real partisans, the later epic, according to him, was more or less a fabrication. In particular, he placed a great deal of weight upon the fact that there was, as he put it, a “difference among the listeners at both performances.” Thus whereas “*Vaiṣampāyana* narrate[d] the first *Mahābhārata* to the king, his priests, and councilors; *Ugraśravas* narrate[d] the second not at the court of *Çatānika*, but before wise men in the forest, whose leader is *Çaunaka*.”⁸⁵ Holtzmann took this reference to the narration of the *Mahābhārata* to king Janamejaya as evidence of its Kṣatriya origins. He argued that the fact that the first *Mahābhārata* (the first revision) was narrated to a king at a court, while the second *Mahābhārata* (the second revision) was narrated to Brahmins in a hermitage suggested a shift in the epic’s contents and outlook. Thus whereas the first narration corresponded to the Brahmanic revision of the Buddhist composition at the court of a king (perhaps Aśoka), the second corresponded to the second Brahmanic revision, once the epic had been completely assimilated to the *Purāṇas* and to Purāṇic ideology.

But although Holtzmann thought this double narration bore out his theories of epic composition, there were a number of problems with his argument. First, he did not explain why, if the point was to obscure all traces of the heroic knightly origin of the epic, the Brahmins would have retained a narration to king Janamejaya. Second, he had placed only the Buddhist poetic composition at the court of a king, not its Brahmanic revision. Thus, in theory, the first narration of the poem could already have occurred in the Naimiṣa Forest to a circle of Brahmin seers. Third, if the Brahmins had, as he claimed, undertaken a revision of the epic with the express intent of impressing their ethics, social codes, and religious outlook on the Germanic warriors, why would they locate its narration in the Naimiṣa Forest? Although explicitly aimed at converting warriors to their cause (Holtzmann wrote: “That this revision was especially intended for the warrior caste, which since time immemorial had been fascinated with the epic, is most likely, given the material and contents of the work”⁸⁶), the epic’s audience in the final redaction appears to have shrunk to a small circle of Brahmins living in a forest hermitage. Surely, if Holtzmann’s views of the *Mahābhārata* as an instrument of Brahmanic propaganda were correct, this narration of a Brahmanic epic ought to have been set at the court of kings, with the heroes and warriors prominently expressing assent. Finally, he saw in Sanjaya’s narration to Dhṛtarāṣṭra the archetype of the Indo-Germanic bardic tradition. Although he did not explicitly clarify whether this narration itself was the old Indo-Germanic epic he had sought, it seems that he conceived of this narration as older than *Vaiṣampāyana*’s narration. Thus, he wrote that “in the main part of our epic” concerning “the description of the great battle,” “*Vaiṣampāyana* gives the word to *Sanjaya*, the friend of *Dhṛtarāṣṭra*. Every evening, after he has come back from the battle, *Sanjaya* narrates to the blind king the events of the day, at first very briefly [and] then in detail.”⁸⁷ From

85. *Ibid.*, 156.

86. *Ibid.*, 150.

87. *Ibid.*, 157.

his perspective, these three narrations coincided neatly with their proposed categories and locations: the Indo-Germanic epic unfolded between a bard and a king on a battlefield; the Brahmanic epic between a Brahman and a king at a court; and the Pūrāṇic between Brahmans in a hermitage. But although each of these occurred in precise sequence, this still left Holtzmann's Buddhist poetic composition unaccounted for. Surely if this was the first written epic, it should be the most prominent of all. Only in one passage did Holtzmann offer a clue as to where he located this Buddhist composition in the Mahābhārata. Noting that "*Buddha* converts the *Sanjaya* in *Magadha* (Oldenberg *Buddha* p. 138)," he argued that this "identity of names . . . could be coincidental," but then clearly drew the opposite conclusion as he noted that "we thus have three narrators: *Sanjaya*, *Vaiṣampāyana*, *Ugrasravas* and three listeners: *Dhṛtarāṣṭra*, *Janamejaya*, *Ṣaunaka*, which would agree with our assumption of an original poem [Urgedichts] and two revisions."⁸⁸ From this reference, it seems that Holtzmann saw Saṃjaya's narration to Dhṛtrāṣṭra as not only the prototype of the Indo-Germanic epic but somehow also related to its Buddhist composition. But in that case, why did he make a distinction between the Indo-Germanic and the Brahmanic traditions, if he did not see that Indo-Germanic and Buddhist traditions as being separate? Surely if the Indo-Germanic culture could evolve into a Buddhist culture, it could also have evolved into Brahmanism. What distinguished Buddhism and Brahmanism?

IDEAS OF ENLIGHTENED RELIGION

In reading Holtzmann's Mahābhārata, we cannot miss the tone of fear at being overrun or overtaken by foreigners. Words such as "Überfremdung" (alienation), "Untergang" (decline), "Verwischung" (loss of identity), "Vertreibung" (expulsion), "Umwälzung" (upheaval), "Umgestaltung" (transformation), "Umdichtung" (recomposition) and "Umarbeitung" (revision), as well as terms such as "Verunstaltung" (defacement), and "Verderbung" (ruination) suggest a pervasive anxiety regarding foreign domination.⁸⁹ The language is always cataclysmic, the events always presented as a loss of purity or an effacement of identity. These fears, as much as a desire to recover a pure Indo-Germanic origin, are at the root of Holtzmann's reconstruction of the epic's history. The following passages may serve to give the reader an idea of the depth of his opposition to a racial and/or cultural confusion:

Buddhism, namely, which one had already compared in its beginning [stages] with Protestantism (Benfey *Orient und Occident* I 139 or Kl. Schftn. I 279), was soon

88. Ibid.

89. For "Untergang," see *ibid.*, 57, 102, 130, 133, 136, and 195; for "Verwischung" (in the form "verwischt"), 16, 71, 72, 142; for "Vertreibung," 102, 152, 166 and 195; for "Umwälzung," 57, 94, 96, 131; for "Umgestaltung," 14, 96, 106 ("umgestalten"), 131, 191, 195; for "Umdichtung" (in the form "umzudichten"), 174; for "Umarbeitung," 6, 14, 96, 106, 131, 191, 195; for "Verunstaltung," 69, 100, 195; for "Verderbung," 46 ("verderbten"), 118 ("verderbt"), 148 ("verderblich"). Holtzmann does not use the term *Überfremdung*, but related words such as "fremd" and "befremdend"; see *ibid.*, 14, 23, 90, 100, 116, 126, and 161.

corrupted through its association with the barren magic of Çivaismus [Śivaism], whose root, on the one hand, must be sought in the wild *demonic cult of the natives*. On Dravidian religion, it suffices here to point out the interesting essay by Caldwell (ancient religion of the Dravidians) at the end of his *Vergleichenden Grammatik* [Comparative Grammar]. It [i.e., Śivaism] was and is comprised, according to its [very] essence, of the worship of evil spirits, *bhūta*, through frenzied dances and repulsive sacrifices: even today in Malayala-country, garlic skins, nails, hair, leeches, lizards are offered to the *bhūtas*, narrates the missionary Karl Graul in his *Reise nach Ostindien* III (1854) 228; among higher animals [however] only the cock *ibid.*, III 185; these sacrifices are procured by Brahmins of a lower rank, who have dedicated themselves to the service of the original demons of the country, [that is] of the *durdevatā* (*ibid.*, III 228. 334 n. 14). Especially the local divinities, the *grāmadevatā*, are almost always such demons, Graul III 73. This service to the *bhūtas* also passed from the natives over to the newcomers, as the epic and the Puranas clearly illustrate.⁹⁰

Furthermore, this *demonism* has been regarded as a *precursor of Çivaismus* [Śivaism], especially by Köppen, who (“der Religion des Buddha” II 1859, p. 29ff.) expresses the view that the rise of Çivaismus is till now an unsolved riddle, but it is probably not Aryan, but rather, arose from the wild demonic cult of the aborigines.... Karl Graul too arrived at the same conviction, [in India] on the ground; he calls Çivaismus “a transplant borrowed from the demonic worship of the Indian aboriginal population and grafted onto Brahmanism” III 187, “a left-over of the sinister nature worship that pervaded India before Brahmanic religion” III 69. In Malayala-country the same repulsive sacrifices are offered to *Çiva* [Śiva] and *Kālī*, and naturally also occasionally to *Vishṇu*, as to the *bhūtas* III 228 and the local divinities, *grāmadevatā*, to whom an orthodox Brahman never offers sacrifice, [but who] are without exception devils belonging to the family or the retinue of *Çiva* III 73.⁹¹

Curiously, Holtzmann does not appear to have seen an opposition between Indo-Germanic and Buddhist culture. On the contrary, as we have seen, he looked on Buddhism favorably and even considered a Buddhist poet working, however improbably, at the court of Aśoka to have been the author of the first written version of the epic. Indeed, he considered Buddhism to have only succumbed to the attacks of the Brahmins because of a “weakening”⁹² that took place it once it entered into contact with aboriginal traditions:

That now a *fusion of Buddhism with Çivaismus* [Śivaism] and therewith also with the demonology of the aborigines took place, that Çivaismus corrupted and defaced Buddhism is a very illuminating suggestion of Köppen, Buddha II 243. It was Çivaismus that introduced foreign elements into the circle of Buddha’s followers: magic and the demonic cult, magical chants, magical circles, incantations, possessions, resurrection of the dead I 558 II 29, whose monstrous idols [are] found [at

90. *Ibid.*, 99 (Holtzmann’s emphasis).

91. *Ibid.*, 99–100 (Holtzmann’s emphasis).

92. *Ibid.*, 98.

the] entrance to Buddhist temples I 505. In those same temples, next to the image of the *Buddha*, *Çiva* as the protector, defender, and avenger of religion and of the Church found a place next to his black spouse, *Kālī* II 29. 260; the necklace of skulls [Schädelkranz] that he wore around his neck had transformed itself into the rosary [Rosenkranz] of the Buddhists II 319.... It was the older Çivaismus that transformed the teaching of the *Buddha* into this barren confusion one calls shamanism [and] that is characterized by a belief in spirits, spells, and magic.⁹³

Thereafter, Buddhism offered an easy target for “the attacks of the newly revived Brahmanism,”⁹⁴ especially since a religion preaching a “message of tolerance and suffering,” according to Holtzmann, “lacked the correct basis” to defend itself.⁹⁵ He claimed that “*Çiva*” had to become a part of the Buddhist pantheon “as the vengeful defender of their faith” in their struggle against Brahmanism.⁹⁶ The alliance however was to no avail. Like the Indo-Germans before them, the Buddhists found themselves in the dilemma that any attempt to strengthen themselves through an alliance with local faiths or local peoples had the effect of simultaneously weakening them as much as if they permitted foreign elements to penetrate their religion. As with the epic tradition, Holtzmann therefore saw Buddhism as being caught in a tragic struggle, where it was only a matter of time before it would be overrun by Brahmanism.

The story Holtzmann recounted of Buddhism was thus essentially identical to the one he recounted of the Indo-Germanic tradition. Indeed, he seems to have considered Buddhism an organic outgrowth of the latter. In his narrative, as Protestantism was to Germanic antiquity, Buddhism was to Indo-Germanic antiquity. Buddhism, for him, represented the fulfillment of the rational spirit of the former. In essential aspects, it replicated Protestantism: it was a tolerant, rational, and austere faith that, at least in its purer incarnations, had little patience with ritual and even less for Brahman priests. Little wonder, then, that he explicitly described it in terms of an Enlightenment:

The rise, growth, battle and decline of Buddhism could not but leave its traces in the development of the Indian race; *Buddhism and Indian literature*, in particular, must have mutually influenced each other much more strongly than it is possible to realize given the present state of research. Such a violent catastrophe as the expulsion of a religion that stood for so long in full blossom and was battled with all the means of politics and of science could not remain without a powerful influence on the development of Indian literature. Art and poetry were eagerly pursued at the courts of Buddhist kings; indeed, Theodor Benfey was inclined to ascribe even the scientific development of grammar, that is, one of the most illustrious aspects of Indian intellectual activity, to Buddhism: “The blossoming of the intellectual life of the Indians proceeded essentially from Buddhism. I have many reasons to think that even one of the most illustrious points of Indian intellectual development, [namely] grammar, was a Buddhist creation” *Pancatantra* I p. XIII. The same [i.e.,

93. Ibid., 100–101.

94. Ibid.

95. Ibid., 102.

96. Ibid.

Benfey] *Kleinere Schriften* I 209: "It is becoming ever more obvious that almost the entirety of the higher intellectual existence of the Indians proceeded predominantly from Buddhism and [that] this [i.e., Buddhism], as long as it blossomed in India, had the greatest and most recent share in this [development]." [Benfey too in volume I, p. 222] presents the same [thesis], that Buddhism "created a vital artistic and scientific life, which also had a highly significant influence outside of its religious circle"; it was "borne and fulfilled by the most vital scientific consciousness" I 244. [Now continuing in his own voice, Holtzmann adds:] One can first speak of an Indian history and literary history when we have succeeded in once again reconquering for Buddhism its influential position in the course of the development of Indian life.⁹⁷

If we [now] return to the times of Buddhism when it was still young, to the *court of Aśoka and his dynasty*, we find all conditions fulfilled there which would make the appearance of a great blossoming of the poetic art likely. In that time, "the land [i.e., India] scaled such a high level of political and social development as never again later, and the administration of state and the political constitution were in all respects so well ordered as only at this one time [in history]" Lassen II 713.⁹⁸

The repulsion of the Macedonians, the successful war against the Seleucids, the final liberation from the Greek yoke must have had all the more vitalizing an effect on the Indian national consciousness. To be sure, Max Müller anc. lit. p. 30 says: "the Indian never knew the feeling of national unity"; but, as it now appears, unfairly. The battle against the Hellenes brought the Indians to a consciousness of their national solidarity and the upswing of patriotic feeling enabled a capable royal family to unite all of north India under a single local sceptre. As a rule, a period of blossoming of national literature follows such times of fortunately ended civil wars, national progress, and growing prosperity . . . If [furthermore] we also add the powerful impulse that the teaching of the *Buddha* exercised on the intellectual life of the Indians of the time, then we may see the times of *Candragupta*, of *Aśoka*, and their dynasty as being, from the very outset, highly conducive to the blossoming of a national literature.⁹⁹

Essentially, Holtzmann's characterization of Buddhism can be reduced to five points:

1. Buddhism was conducive to "a consciousness of . . . national solidarity."
2. It was a period marked by the "upswing of patriotic feeling," and the "[unification of] all of north India under a single local sceptre."
3. In a "time of fortunately ended civil wars," "national progress," and "growing prosperity," a growth in scientific knowledge ensued.
4. Patronage of "art and poetry" at "the courts of Buddhist kings," was conducive to the "scientific development of grammar" and the "blossoming of the intellectual life of the Indians."
5. Finally, this was also the period that saw the creation of "a vital artistic and scientific life," "borne and fulfilled by the most vital scientific consciousness."

97. *Ibid.*, 102–3.

98. *Ibid.*, 104 (Holtzmann's emphasis).

99. *Ibid.*, 105.

Holtzmann also explicitly compared Aśoka to king Frederick I of Prussia and the Enlightenment philosopher and critic, Lessing. He wrote that although “*Açoka* [Aśoka] appears to have felt himself to be a Buddhist somewhat more seriously than Constantine, who is so often compared to him, was a Christian, he nonetheless deserves to be termed a follower of the *Buddha* only in the same broad but true sense as that in which we call Frederick the Great and Gotthold Ephraim Lessing Protestants.”¹⁰⁰ In yet another passage, he introduced Buddhism in terms that suggest he saw a parallel between the Enlightened tolerance of Frederick I and the religious pluralism of Aśoka:

The religion that *Açoka* introduced at his court was a plural religion just like that later of the great Moghul Akbar [the reference is to Din-i-Ilahi, a religion founded by Akbar]; he himself was “more a human than a Buddhist and as a ruler too clever to force Buddhist dogmas onto his subjects, that is why he consistently emphasized the universal human in his edicts” Weber Ind. Strf. III 285. [Now continuing, Holtzmann adds:] His inscriptions recommend a universal tolerance and ethics that is nobler than all ceremonial ritual [Ceremoniendienst]; they all preach peaceableness and religious toleration, while they only refer rarely to the *Buddha*.¹⁰¹

These passages suggest that when Holtzmann presented Buddhism in terms reminiscent of eighteenth-century Germany, he did not merely intend to describe it in terms his readers might be familiar with. Rather, he seems to have wished the comparison to be read literally. In his project to recover the ancient Indo-Germanic tradition, Buddhism constituted the counterpart to Protestantism in the East. It offered him a way of creating a certain narrative of the Germanic peoples in which there was a direct connection between their heroic, tribal culture and the scientific achievements of the Enlightenment. In a number of passages, Holtzmann explicitly affirmed this connection. Writing of Aśvatthāman’s nighttime massacre of the sleeping warriors (an undertaking in which he is aided by the goddess Kālī), he noted that the fact that he carried out his massacre “almost without accomplices” “suggests that the old legend provided him [i.e., Aśvatthāman] with one of the old gods as a helper, whose involvement, however, was at first completely eliminated by the Enlightenment [Aufklärung], but later on reintroduced under the name of one of the new gods.”¹⁰² Although the sole occurrence of the term *Aufklärung* in Holtzmann’s *Mahābhārata*, the use of this term to describe the Buddhist stage of the epic is significant. He also used the terms *Gegenreformation* (Counter-Reformation) and *Religionskriege* (wars of religion) to describe the conflict between Buddhism and Brahmanism.¹⁰³ In the same passage, he also spoke of “the hard and bloody battle” between Brahmanism and Buddhism and of the “extermination” of Buddhism following a successful Counter-Reformation.¹⁰⁴

100. *Ibid.*, 116.

101. *Ibid.*

102. *Ibid.*, 122.

103. *Ibid.*, 98.

104. *Ibid.*

IDEAS OF RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION

In this assimilation of Buddhism to Protestantism, it was very important for Holtzmann to underscore the damage done to Buddhism by Brahmanism. Just as the rise of Brahmanism had been harmful to the Indo-Germanic tradition, so, too, was its revival in the eighth century devastating to Buddhism. In the story Holtzmann told, the Indo-Germanic and Buddhist periods constituted one seamless entity. In his opinion, left to itself, the Indo-Germanic tradition would have continued in a transformed yet essentially similar form in Buddhism, much like the Germanic tribes found their truest fulfillment in Protestantism. Brahmanic resurgence, however, disrupted this continuity, threatening to rupture German history at its source. Obviously, something had to be done and that something, Holtzmann proposed, was to counter Brahmanism by exposing or perhaps even reversing its falsifications and corruptions. But before we look at how Holtzmann envisaged Mahābhārata criticism as a form of historical intervention, it is important to first understand how he conceived of the relationship of Buddhism to Brahmanism.

In the story of Germanic betrayal Holtzmann recounted, the narrative of persecution occupied an important place. For him, it was important to portray the Buddhists, no less than the ancient Indo-Germans, as a persecuted people. From his perspective, the free-thinking, independent spirit of the Germans made them a target for others. As he saw it, the history of the Germanic peoples was one long story of being forced to abase themselves before lesser peoples. For instance, citing Tacitus, he argued that German warriors found death preferable to surrender. Holtzmann also made frequent reference to the way the ancient Indo-Germans were defeated by the treachery of non-Āryan tribes, who did not adhere to the heroic code of the Germans. But his most explicit criticisms were reserved for the persecution the Buddhists—allegedly—suffered at the hands of the Brahmins. Indeed, it is here that he first introduced the idea of religious persecution, via the use of the word *Ketzer* (heretic). The term, dating back to the eleventh or twelfth century, was originally used in the sense of *haereticus*. It is thought to have originated with the Manichean sect of the Cathari (*Katharoi*, the pure). Variants are present throughout Europe; although the origin is lost, the word was placed in a certain relationship to the cat (German *Katze*), the devil's animal.¹⁰⁵ Before we look more closely at the meanings associated with the term, let us consider its occurrences in Holtzmann's Mahābhārata. In all, Holtzmann used *Ketzer* and related terms a total of 16 times. The greatest concentration of terms occurs in chapters 13 (8 occurrences) and 15 (3 occurrences), followed by chapter 12 (2 occurrences). The term occurs only once within chapters 5, 14, and 16. Thus, half of all occurrences can be found in chapter 13 ("Traces of Buddhism in the Present Mahābhārata"). The most frequent form is *Ketzer* (11 occurrences, including the dative plural *Ketzern*), followed by *Keztere* (heresy) and *Ketzerhass* (hatred of heretics) (2 occurrences each). Finally, *Ketzersecte* (heretic sect) occurs

105. *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, s.v. "Ketzer."

only once—a reference to the Cārvākas, who according to Holtzmann are a symbol in the Mahābhārata for the “extirpation” of Buddhism.¹⁰⁶ Three of these references are especially significant. Writes Holtzmann:

1. “In the *Bhagavatapurāṇa* 6, 8, 17 *Buddha* is represented as an incarnation of *Vishṇu* and is invoked for protection against heresy [Ketzer].”¹⁰⁷
2. “When *Manu* 4, 30 says that a heretic [Ketzer] is not to be greeted, the one commentator explains the word *pāshaṇḍin*, heretic [Ketzer], with: Buddhist, the other with: ascetic in a red robe, Bühler *Manu* p. 133.”¹⁰⁸
3. “In the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, *Çiva* occasionally still comes out looking bad; his followers are called heretics [Ketzer] (*pāshaṇḍa*) 4, 2, 32; of the Vishnuites, it is said that they desert the *ghorarūpān bhūtapatin* 1, 2, 26.”¹⁰⁹

Why did Holtzmann seize upon this one term to characterize the relationship of Buddhism to Brahmanism? Positively, he had already identified Buddhism with Protestantism and attributed it characteristics he associated with the Enlightenment such as economic, social, and scientific progress. However, this still left its relationship to Brahmanism underdetermined. Holtzmann regarded Brahmanism as a backward faith and thought that only a violent Counter-Reformation had permitted it to regain control over the Indian subcontinent. But he still needed to characterize the relationship of Brahmanism to Buddhism more precisely. The reference to Buddhists as *pāshaṇḍa* (atheists or those following false doctrines) gave him a way to do this.

Curiously, though, in the 14 instances where he used the term (16 if we count the derivatives), only four were based on actual textual references. These four were to Bhāgavata Purāṇa 6.8.19 (incorrectly cited as 6.8.17), Bhāgavata Purāṇa 4.2.32, Manusmṛti 4.30, and an incomplete reference to Bṛhannāradiyapurāṇa. Except for these four, Holtzmann’s use of Ketzer appears to have been on his own initiative. Further, the texts he cited did not refer to Buddhists literally as Ketzer, but used the Sanskrit *pāshaṇḍa* instead.¹¹⁰ Holtzmann took both these passages as referring to Ketzer. However, Amarakośa expounds *pāshaṇḍam* as *vaidikamārgaviruddhi* (opponent of the Vedic path) and *duḥśāstravartin* (follower of the wrong *śāstra*). In both instances, the term refers to religious conflict not in the sense of Holtzmann’s *Religionskrieg*, but in the sense of a philosophical debate concerning correct understanding (and a correct way of life based upon this understanding). The translation *heterodox*, which contains the Greek *doxa* (*opinio*, opinion), is perhaps closer to what is meant.

106. See Holtzmann Jr., *Zur Geschichte und Kritik*, 36 and 103 (for “Ketzeri”); 106, 108, 110, 111, 118, 122, 127, 140, 150, and 193 (for “Ketzer”); 109 (for “Ketzersecte”); 118 and 140 (for “Ketzerhass”).

107. *Ibid.*, 103.

108. *Ibid.*, 110–11.

109. *Ibid.*, 150.

110. See Bhāgavata Purāṇa 6.8.19: *dvaipāyano bhagavān aprabodhād buddhastu pāshaṇḍagānapramādāt / kalkiḥ kaleḥ kālamalāt prapātu dharmāvanāyōrukṛtāvatāraṇ /* and Bhāgavata Purāṇa 4.2.32: *tad brahma paramaṁ śuddhaṁ satāṁ vartma sanātānam / vigarhya yāta pāshaṇḍam daivaṁ vo yatra bhūta-rāt* ||.

From Holtzmann's perspective, however, the translation of *pāshaṇḍa* by Ketzer was more expedient. Holtzmann wanted to construe the relationship between Buddhism and Brahmanism on analogy with that between Protestantism and Catholicism and the term *Ketzer*, with its associations with the Counter-Reformation, gave him a way to do so. His uncle, Adolf Holtzmann Sr., had been vicar in Kandern and it is thus quite likely that he was aware of the implications of labeling Buddhists heretics. Crucially, by attributing the use of the term to the Brahmans, he could play on Protestant fears of Catholic misuse of authority. Grimm's dictionary notes: "Protestants and reformed were and are then overwhelmingly called ketzer among Catholics; for example, Schönsleder clarifies [the meaning of] ketzerei using [terms such as] 'Luthertum, Calvinum profiteri.'" ¹¹¹ The appellation *Ketzer* could be a death sentence, as it was in the case of several Reformers. The indiscriminate use of *Ketzer* seems to have been designed to suggest a connection between Brahmanism and Catholicism.

In pursuit of this goal, Holtzmann often used the term in relation to the Buddhists. For instance, in his use of the term on pages 108 to 109 and on 118, he confused a textual argument with a historical argument. As we have seen earlier, Holtzmann claimed that the earliest poetic composition had been composed at the court of a Buddhist king. It ought therefore to bear traces of this Buddhist influence. However, later redactors, being hostile to Buddhism, revised the epic, presenting Duryodhana, Karna, and others (who Holtzmann thought were possibly fictionalized characters based on actual Buddhist kings or heroes) in an unflattering light. Holtzmann specifically pointed to the fact that Duryodhana has heretical traits in the *Mahābhārata* such as refusing to acknowledge the divinity of Kṛṣṇa and persecuting his followers. The argument has a superficial appeal, since it appears plausible that a persecuted group might create a fictional account portraying their persecutors in a negative light, above all as heretics and evil men destined to fall. But when we look more closely at Holtzmann's account, we find a number of problems with the argument. To begin with, the Brahmans did not have a blank page before them. Rather, as he explicitly argued, they took over a preexisting epic, the so-called poetic Buddhist composition. Further, they not only had to revise this text, reversing the balance between the good and evil sides, but as Holtzmann explicitly claimed in the *Ketzer*-passage on page 109, they also had to "excis[e]" the names of the originally good side (who now took on the role of the aggressors in the revised epic). ¹¹² But how could the Brahmans, on the one hand, undertake to erase the memory of the heretical movement of Buddhism and, on the other hand, also undertake an inversion of the poem? Either their intent could have been to portray the Buddhists as heretics or to deny their existence; but the only way to claim that they wished to do both is to confuse a historical argument with a textual one, as Holtzmann in fact did.

Holtzmann seems to have been unaware of these tensions in his work. Obsessed with drawing a parallel between Brahmanism and Catholicism and with showing how, in the absence of the German critic, the Counter-Reformation had succeeded in India, he overlooked the fact that he was trying to attribute two contradictory

111. *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, s.v. "Ketzer."

112. Holtzmann Jr., *Zur Geschichte und Kritik*, 109.

motivations to the Brahmins at the same time. From his perspective, it seemed self-evident that the Brahmins would seek in every way to gain the upper hand over the Buddhists. Thus, they would seek not only to invert the fundamental ethical and social values of the epic but also to excise certain details such as all references favorable to Duryodhana and to conceal or change the identities of Duryodhana and his allies, who could not be recognized as Buddhist rulers or as being based upon Buddhist rulers. As he noted, “excessive polemics” by “arous[ing] curiosity and doubt in the reader” could have the opposite effect to the one intended.¹¹³ Hence, he argued, the Brahmins were forced into two kinds of responses: they could either oppose or, alternately, obscure the text. Under the first rubric, he included all the passages he thought had been intentionally retained as a warning to the readers, as well as those he thought the Brahmanic redactors overlooked. In the Ketzer-passage on page 118, he thought he had found the archetype of all such references. In his opinion, the reference to the Cārvakas in this passage was intended as an oblique reference to the “exterminated Buddhism.”¹¹⁴ As he described it,

After the priests had attained complete victory, they to be sure did not let the literature of the Buddhists fully vanish, but they completely revised whatever they considered worth preserving and carefully removed all elements that opposed their system. They attained their goal; it was as though the *Buddha* had never lived, his teaching never ruled. Therewith, the Brahmins exterminated the historical sense in their race completely, so that even European scholarship got the impression that one can hardly speak of inner history and development in India, [but] only of permanence and ossification.¹¹⁵

Finally, on pages 118 and 140, Holtzmann also invoked “Ketzerhass” as the reason for revision. He argued that it was possible, from “the present form” of the epic, to sense that the Brahmins had been motivated by extreme hatred toward the Buddhists. “This hatred of heretics [Ketzerhass],” he wrote, “is expressed clearly enough in the present form of the *Mahābhārata* and of the *Purāṇa* [Holtzmann refers to the *Purāṇas* collectively as a genre] . . . atonement is possible for all sins, but whoever has contact with Buddhists and heretics cannot be absolved of his sins says the *Brhannāradyapurāṇa* Aufrecht cat. Bodl. 10a.” Even though Holtzmann’s argument was nonsensical (we can make assumptions about the Brahmins’ motivations only once we have two versions of the text for comparison and not simply on the basis of what we think was removed by them out of hatred toward the Buddhists), he also declared Ketzerhass to be the reason why Kṛṣṇa did not permit the Pāṇḍavas to mourn for the fallen Ghaṭotkaca. Even more problematically, he then concluded, “all the more [i.e., all the more, given this Ketzerhass] did all recollections of that time have to be eliminated.”¹¹⁶ This conclusion clearly did not follow: if the Brahmins’ aim had been to eliminate all recollections, they would hardly have retained the story of the heretical Ghaṭotkaca. Moreover, the argument as a whole

113. Ibid., 118.

114. Ibid., 109.

115. Ibid., 104.

116. Ibid., 118.

suffered from *petitio principii*. Holtzmann's reason for asserting that the Brahmins had undertaken a revision was that he assumed that the Brahmins, being opposed to the Buddhists, could not have let the Buddhist text stand. But as proof of their opposition to the Buddhists, he then pointed to the same text, arguing that the revisions to the epic demonstrated the Brahmins' hatred of the Buddhists.

Why did Holtzmann insist on defending the hypothesis of Brahmanic persecution even when his arguments for it, as we have seen, were unconvincing? A look at his second reference to Ketzerhass, on page 140, is revealing. Noting that "[as] we know from the story of Kopronymos [i.e., emperor Constantine V] . . . the hatred of heretics [Ketzerhass] can follow its victims all the way into their diapers [bis in die Windeln hinein]," he argued that references to Duryodhana's inauspicious birth were further evidence of how the Brahmins pursued their vendetta against Buddhism even to the point of defaming their enemies' childhood.¹¹⁷ Holtzmann's reference to Constantine V, who was titled Kopronymos or Copronymos (the Dung-named one; *kopros*, feces or animal dung; *onoma*, name) by Byzantine sources for his support of iconoclasm,¹¹⁸ suggests that once again the context for his work was not the Indian epic nor even Buddhism, but rather European history, especially as it pertained to conflict between the Church and various schismatic movements.¹¹⁹ The suggestion that Brahmins had prosecuted Buddhists under the pretext of "heresy" was clearly designed to evoke Protestant resentments toward the Catholic Church. Luther himself had been found guilty of heresy by the Papal Legate Cajetan in 1518. (That he escaped being delivered to Rome was due to a lucky coincidence: the death of Emperor Maximilian in January 1519 created a power vacuum in the Holy Roman Empire. As pope and Curia jostled for power in the race to nominate the new emperor, the time was not opportune for a conflict with Luther's protector, the Great Elector of Saxony.¹²⁰) As with his ideas of the old heroic Indo-Germanic epic, here too Holtzmann was using the Mahābhārata merely as a foil for Protestant anxieties.

IDEAS OF RELIGIOUS CORRUPTION

Not surprisingly, the largest part of Holtzmann's Mahābhārata was dedicated to a censure of the Brahmins, whom he blamed for the destruction of Germanic culture in both its ancient heroic Āryan incarnation and its modern rationalist Buddhist/Protestant incarnation. We first look at some of his main criticisms under three headings: (1) repression of Buddhism and infiltration by folk cults; (2) Corruption

117. *Ibid.*, 140.

118. See François Xavier de Feller, *Biographie universelle ou dictionnaire historique*, vol. 4 (Paris: J. Leroux, 1848), 33, who explains the name as "ainsi appelé parce qu'il sâlit les fonts baptismaux lorsqu'on le baptisait."

119. See the entry for "Constantine V," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, ed. Alexander P. Kazhdan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 501.

120. Manfred Schulze, "Luther, Martin (1483–1546)," in *Biographisches-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexicon*, vol. 5 (Herzberg: Verlag Traugott Bautz, 1993), 447–82.

of texts and insertion of mystical doctrines; (3) Arrogance, greed, misuse of authority:

1. Repression of Buddhism and infiltration by folk cults:

A main sign of the second puranic revision in contrast to the first Brahmanic [revision] appears to me to be the *reconciliation with Īiva* [Śiva]. The long battle with Buddhism had forced the Brahmins to look around for allies in their own people and to conclude a compromise, as earlier with Vishnuism, so too now with Īvaismus [Śaivism]. Following Īiva then the entire apparatus of the later folk religions of India gained entrance into the mythology of the Indians and gave it that tasteless imprint which Goethe had treated with such justified repugnance.¹²¹

After driving out Buddhism, the earlier allies of the Buddhists, the Brahmins—clever as they were to hold on to the main thing and constantly ready to [make] all possible concessions in secondary matters—had nothing more to object against a folk god such as Īiva, as long as his followers left the authority of the Vedas and the supremacy of the Brahmins untouched: in these two points, however, they did not and do not [even today] appreciate any frivolity at all.¹²²

The decay of Brahmanism first occurs when they [i.e., the Brahmins] no longer had any rival to fear; after they had driven out Buddhism, there arose among them [i.e., the Brahmins] a boundless insolence, which even foreign rule was not capable of dampening. But as concerns the *Mahābhārata*, we may at least be thankful to them that they preserved the poem from loss and have not completely distorted it, which no power could have prevented them from doing [had they wanted to do so].¹²³

2. Corruption of texts and insertion of mystical doctrines:

With the second revision of the poem coincides the violent *transformation of the Mahābhārata into a law code or dharmācāstra*. The epic, the favorite lecture of the warriors of old, became a textbook intended for those who were not permitted to read the Vedas or, like the warriors themselves, did not understand them; their Veda is the *Mahābhārata*, the fifth Veda as it is called now and again . . . and this poem so beloved since time immemorial among the warrior class had to put up with being transformed into a kind of encyclopedia and having endless teachings about all possible things divine and human inserted into it in the form of unending speeches; the books *Çānti* [Śāntiparvan] and *Anuçāsana* [Anuśāsanaparvan] completely [and] large parts of the books *Vana* and *Udyoga* are dedicated to these goals. According to the Indian view, the aim of the *Mahābhārata* is a didactic one: in the hands of the Brahmins the ancient epic has been changed into a didactic legend, Max Müller anc. lit. p. 18.¹²⁴

121. Holtzmann Jr., *Zur Geschichte und Kritik*, 165–66 (Holtzmann's emphasis).

122. Ibid., 166.

123. Ibid., 195.

124. Ibid., 177–78 (emphasis in original).

One sees that the Indians hold precisely these didactic sections of the great poem to be the decisive ones, whereas for the European reader they are a boring torture.¹²⁵

They [the Brahmins] have transformed the old heroic poem, the most beautiful spiritual treasure of their race, into a boring Purana that only preaches worship of *Vishṇu*, reverence before the Brahmins, and soulless faith in works [Werkdienst]. Spain has been cited as an example of what a monastic worldview can do to an entire race over which it gains power; anyone who wishes to see the same principle at work in poetry ought to study the *Mahābhārata*.¹²⁶

3. Arrogance, greed, misuse of authority:

Just as were the Vishnuistic [tendencies], so too were the Brahmanic tendencies continuously heightened; I mean the efforts to exaggerate ever more the privileges of the priestly caste and their honor equivalent [even] to the gods. After the victory over the Buddhists the Brahmins no longer had to fear a rival and lapsed into boundless pride, which expressed itself all the more drastically, the later the time to which the respective piece of the *Mahābhārata* belongs. The worst passages in this regard are those contained in the book which, according to all indications, is the youngest, namely, the thirteenth. One can read passages such as 13, 35, 19 = 2160: "Through the grace of the Brahmins, the gods inhabit heaven, only through submission before the Brahmins can the earth be ruled, the Brahmins are gods even to the gods themselves"; cf. Muir S. T. I 130. 506.¹²⁷

Unconditional faith in *Vishṇu*, reverence before the Brahmins, and precise observation of the external ceremony [äusserlichen Ceremoniells], this is finally all that is recommended to the contemporary reader of the *Mahābhārata* and, to the warrior, in particular, the reports of the deeds of the gods and the heroes are only related in such a form that he can never forget how every victory is only due to the help of *Vishṇu* and the strengthening power of priestly prayer and sacrifice. If *Indra* himself in all his glory trembles more before every holy man than all the *Asuras* together, how much more cause does an earthly king have to fear and to honor the Brahmins.¹²⁸

Brahmanic arrogance and esteem of salvation through works [Werkdiensts] attain their highest level here [Holtzmann means the thirteenth book of the epic, which always attracted his particular ire]. The Brahman as such is worthy of worship, irrespective of his personality; "whether well-dressed or dirty, whether eating or fasting, whether the clothing is fine or coarse, a Brahman is a Brahman" 13, 152, 14 = 7175. Besides obedience and generosity in relation to the Brahmins, the king has no other duties that he could not dispense with. "When you want to possess the ocean-girted earth, worship the Brahmins with submission and gifts; only by gifts can their majesty be placated" 13, 35, 22 = 2163. In these unending

125. Ibid., 179.

126. Ibid., 194.

127. Ibid., 176–77.

128. Ibid., 177.

and peevishly boring speeches of the books *Çānti* [Śāntiparvan] and *Anuṣāsana* [Anuśāsanaparvan] is truly de rebus omnibus et quibusdam aliis the language.¹²⁹

These excessive and unfounded criticisms suggested that the central motivation for Holtzmann's reconstructions of the epic was not an interest in the epic itself much less a desire to appreciate it for its philosophy, literary richness, or, indeed, for its narrative. Rather, the epic was a mere object in his quest to define German identity as secular, Enlightened, and rational. In this quest, the hypostatized concept of "Brahmanism" no less than that of "Buddhism" offered him a means of making certain points about the relationship of Protestantism to Catholicism. His characterizations of Buddhism and Brahmanism were primarily drawn from his ideas of Protestantism and Catholicism.¹³⁰ The term *Werkdienst*, used throughout in a negative sense, in particular gave him a way to make a case against Brahmanism.¹³¹ Thus, whereas he saw Buddhism as an Enlightened, proto-rational religion, he characterized Brahmanism in terms familiar from the Lutheran critique of the Catholic church (see table 2.1 for a comparison of his characterizations of the two religions). Among the many charges Holtzmann raised against the Brahmans was that they extracted money from the laity in return for spurious services and promises of attaining eternal bliss in the afterlife, that they advocated the efficacy of works, and that their religion was oriented toward external ceremonies, but lacked an inner spiritual core. Holtzmann also suggested that the Brahmans, by inserting themselves between the peoples and their (original) gods, had made direct, simple worship impossible. Instead, they had become the intermediaries between the people and the gods, with the further result that a devout populace was now delivered over entirely to their control.

Further, he claimed Brahmanism with its ceremonialism, its sophistic reasoning, and its confusion of moral doctrines was responsible for the decline of the Indo-Germans. Citing the opinions of Rammohan Roy, he argued that Brahmanism had corrupted the moral sense of the Indians:

Kṛṣṇa and his pupils gladly cite sentences from the scriptures in justification of their faithlessness, old proverbs and holy verses, the example of the gods, religious and philosophical teachings, which they then interpret and apply according to their convenience. The old mythology, founded as little as that of Homer on a moral

129. Ibid., 188–89.

130. This is true not only of Holtzmann, but also of other scholars such as Albrecht Weber, Christian Lassen, and Hermann Oldenberg. As a rule, the story Western critics of the Indian epics told replicated their own understanding of European cultural history, especially as concerns the reformation of social and political institutions and the enlightenment of the human mind.

131. Grimms notes that around the mid-seventeenth century *Werkdienstler* is used as a "dismissive characterization of the Catholics, who hope to attain justification before god through the performance of [good] works (opera bona)" and provides the following interesting notice: "It has been . . . proven by me, that the werckdienstler [i.e., those seeking salvation through the performance of good works] in Papacy [pabstthumb; cf. modern German Papsttum] make god to an unjust god; J. A. SCHERTZLER beweis (1664) C 2a." *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, s.v. "Werkdienstler."

Table 2.1 HOLTZMANN'S CHARACTERIZATIONS OF BUDDHISM AND BRAHMANISM COMPARED

Buddhism	Brahmanism
Enlightened	Unenlightened
Tolerant	Prone to fundamentalist violence
Conducive to scientific inquiry and scientific progress	Dogmatic; opposed to scientific inquiry
Socially progressive	Socially conservative
Possessing historical self-consciousness	Lacking historical self-consciousness and antihistorical
Egalitarian	Caste based
Nationalistic	Under the Brahmins' control; given to infighting among rival sects
Conducive to the development of grammar and the philological sciences	Sunk in mystic speculation; hostile to critical thinking

basis, offered enough examples which the politicians could invoke; may God speedily purify the minds of my countrymen from the corruptness that such tales are too apt to produce, calls out the admirable Rammohun Roy, after he has listed such accounts. Translations of books of the Vedas 2nd ed. London 1832 p. 189. *Kṛṣṇa* invokes such examples; *Indra* and the other gods too, he says, have in battles with their enemies not scorned the weapons of deceit and of treason 9, 58, 5 = 3250.¹³²

Holtzmann, moreover, thought there was a direct connection between the Brahmins' corruption of the epic and their corruption of the values of their people. The old epic, which preserved a recollection of the archaic age, had been the principal source of moral guidance for the ancient Indo-Germanic tribes. It had instructed them in values (death is preferable to dishonor), afterlife representations (for the warrior dying on the battlefield, entry into heaven is assured), social codes (the knightly code in warfare, the duty of blood-vengeance), and, in general, promulgated a virile, free-spirited outlook. By contrast, Brahmanism had tied the people down to ritual, made them fearful of gods and punishments, rendered them passive through ideas of karma and rebirth, and in general, caused them to become, by turns, underhanded and subservient.

Holtzmann's critique of the Brahmins was not restricted to the charge that Brahmanism had led Indians away from their Germanic heritage and, in the process, caused them to become weak and enervated. Rather, he also took umbrage at what he considered the Brahmins' self-serving reason for imposing their belief system upon the people: their desire to enrich themselves at the people's expense through requiring various sacrificial offerings and gifts. Commenting on the exhortation to practice charity toward the Brahmins, Holtzmann wrote, "especially conscientiously

132. Holtzmann Jr., *Zur Geschichte und Kritik*, 84–85.

is emphasized his [i.e., Yudhiṣṭhira's] generosity in relation to Brahmans; he presents them at every suitable occasion with thousands of cows, [and] even at unsuitable [times], for example when he lives in the dense forest as a helpless exile 2, 32, 2 = 904."¹³³ He also wrote, "besides obedience and generosity in relation to the Brahmans the king has no other duties that he could not dispense with. 'When you want to possess the ocean-girted earth, worship the Brahmans with submission and gifts; only by gifts can their majesty be placated' 13, 35, 22 = 2163."¹³⁴ In yet other passages, Holtzmann rehearsed Luther's criticism of works and of ceremonialism.¹³⁵ In his opinion, "Buddha had wanted to teach nothing else than what the older or contemporaneous Upanishad also taught, which, in the same way, rejected the belief in salvation through works [Werkheiligkeit] and ceremonialism [Ceremoniendienst] and declared the Veda to be inadequate for attaining the highest good [of salvation]."¹³⁶ However, with the "Brahman Restoration" around the eighth century CE, Holtzmann argued, "ceremonialism [Ceremoniendienst] and the belief in salvation through works [Werkheiligkeit]" took the place of "morals and religion." He further claimed that the effects of this return to ceremonialism and to works could be seen "down to our times."¹³⁷ Likewise, he noted of the Dānadharmaparvan of the Śāntiparvan that "Brahmanic arrogance and esteem of salvation through works [Werkdiensts] attain[ed] their highest level here."¹³⁸ In the concluding passage of the book, he once again returned to the theme of works, writing, "not without a justified displeasure against the Brahmans, we set down the old epic. They have transformed the old heroic poem, the most beautiful spiritual treasure of their race into a boring Purana that only preaches worship of *Vishṇu*, reverence before the Brahmans, and thoughtless faith in works [Werkdienst]."¹³⁹

The rejection of works and the criticism of ceremonial were central components of Luther's critique of Catholicism. Both feature, for instance, in the first and second articles of the Smalcald Articles of 1537, in language that is remarkably similar to that found in Holtzmann's critique of Brahmanism.¹⁴⁰ Holtzmann, in reprising this criticism, was clearly drawing on this Lutheran heritage. Seen in conjunction with his comments about the Brahmanic persecution of Buddhists as heretics and his attribution of a successful Counter-Reformation to the Brahmans, it is clear that he sought to project his problems with Catholicism onto Brahmanism. But the inspiration for this Lutheran critique of Catholicism came from elsewhere. It was not Protestantism per se, but rather, a Romantic fascination with German antiquity, inherited ultimately

133. Ibid., 134–35.

134. Ibid., 189.

135. For a discussion of Luther's attitude toward the sacraments, see Werner Jetter, *Die Taufe beim jungen Luther: Eine Untersuchung über das Werden der reformatorischen Sakraments- und Taufanschauung* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1954).

136. Holtzmann Jr., *Zur Geschichte und Kritik*, 117.

137. Ibid., 149.

138. Ibid., 188.

139. Ibid., 194.

140. See especially the first article (Martin Luther, *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions* [St. Louis: Concordia, 2005]).

from his uncle, that motivated Holtzmann to activate elements of Luther's critique against Brahmanism. The motif of blaming "priests" for the destruction of the Germanic epic tradition, for instance, came directly from Holtzmann Sr.'s studies on the *Nibelungenlied*. In his words,

we know, in essence, the content and the form of the German epic, which preserved the mythological representations and the historical recollections of the most ancient times, and was transmitted in its purity and completeness from generation to generation by a well-organized bardic guild that stood in connection with the priesthood. In this way the epic, the old mare, survived till the time of the introduction of Christianity. The Church, however, could not suppress the old religion without also destroying the epic. Along with the ancient sacrificial hymns and prayers, the mythological and, closely associated with them, historical poems too had to perish. Along with the heathen priests, the caretakers of the epic poetry had to disappear before the Christian bishops. Indeed, the Church was for a period of time in doubt whether it did not also want to eliminate the German language; and, after all, a language permeated by heathenism must have been a great hindrance to the new religion. How tenaciously, however, the language endured, how impossible its destruction was, is shown best in terms of the circumstance that even for high Christian festivals the Church had to tolerate the usage of heathen, mythological names, such as Easter. Thus, in spite of all bans and the strongest measures, it did not succeed in suppressing the old poems. Precisely the ever repeated strengthening of the ban against the *cantica rustica, inepta, gentilia, diabolica* demonstrates how unwillingly the populace let itself be robbed of its historic recollections. But since the songs lacked the care of a trained bardic class, they had to necessarily lose their completeness and purity; they fell apart into fragments, which gradually sank from the old noble style of the heroic poems into the coarser tones of the ballads. Heathen motifs had motivated the old songs and dominated them as the leading idea; as heathenism disappeared and was forgotten, much had to become unintelligible in the old songs; there remained only the torn limbs of a body whose soul had fled. Finally, in order to find acceptance by the clergy, they had to replace the vanished heathen motifs by Christian [motifs] and cosy up to the completely changed customs. These are the highly unfavorable conditions under which the old epic could still endure for a while after the introduction of Christianity.¹⁴¹

Holtzmann Jr.'s project was a little more complicated, since he crossed his uncle's Romantic ideas of Germanic antiquity with a positive evaluation of modernity. Whereas Holtzmann Sr. seems to have subscribed to a kind of neo-paganism, Holtzmann Jr. seems to have been much more religious. To be sure, we find the same love of primitivism and irrationalism in his work as in his uncle's, as when he enthuses about the war gods of the ancient Indo-Germans. But primitivism appears in his case to have been tempered by a rather austere vision of Protestantism. And

141. Holtzmann Sr., *Untersuchungen über das Nibelungenlied*, 170–71.

whereas his uncle gave up his post as vicar to embark on a new program of study in Sanskrit and Indo-Germanic, and ultimately, on a second career as a Nibelungenlied critic, Holtzmann Jr. traced the reverse trajectory, starting out as a Sanskritist and using Indian texts to slowly work his way back to ideas of his faith. As we have seen, he regarded the Enlightenment and Frederician Germany in glowing terms. His comparison of Buddhism to Protestantism show that he had an extremely positive evaluation of Protestantism. He saw in it the fulfillment of the rationalistic, free-spirited mindset of the Germans. In contrast, he regarded Catholicism in uniformly negative terms. Although he was sympathetic to Indian antiquity, he did not see this past in an organic relationship to the present, or, indeed, even to the classical age. For him, it was only Buddhism that was the legitimate successor to Indo-Germanic antiquity, much as Protestantism was the legitimate successor to Germanic antiquity.

From Holtzmann's explicit comparisons of Brahmins with Catholic priests and Scholastics, it is clear that he was ultimately using the Indian epic as a foil for German history. In a sense, he was projecting his uncle's argument onto the Indian context, perhaps to test its validity or perhaps to find external confirmation of a hypothesis he was using to interpret European history. But whereas his uncle could uniformly reject Christianity (and, one presumes, also modernity), Holtzmann Jr. found himself in the unusual situation of having to defend Protestantism while rejecting Catholicism as being damaging to the spirit of the Indo-Germans. This introduced an important modulation into his uncle's thesis. It was not Christianity in toto that had destroyed the epic tradition (as his uncle had thought), but only that part of it which could be identified with unscrupulous priests, ceremonialism, insistence on donation and the belief in works—in a word, Catholicism. At a deeper level still, Holtzmann was not just interested in a critique of Catholicism (via its Eastern analogue, Brahmanism), but in actually intervening in history. Setting out from his uncle's assumption that Catholicism had destroyed the ancient epic culture of the Germans, he undertook to show that if he could but reconstruct the original epic, he could simultaneously undo the damage done by the Catholic interregnum and thus, ultimately, restore an integral history to Germany. In this project, the Mahābhārata played a crucial role. First, it allowed him to postulate an original Indo-Germanic epic on the basis of (imaginary) points of contact between the Mahābhārata and the Nibelungenlied. On the basis of this epic (or, rather, the traces of it he claimed to find in the Mahābhārata), he was then able to delineate the outlines of a heroic Germanic culture. In a second step, he then undertook to show that Brahmanism was a corruption of the heroic tradition. Its sources lay outside the Indo-Germanic tradition (specifically, outside the Āryan race, as we shall see). Further, as Holtzmann repeatedly argued, it was fundamentally at odds with the spiritual and moral outlook of the Germans. Textual reconstruction of the original thus took on added urgency as a means of undoing Brahmanic corruption of Germanic culture. And once he succeeded in reconstructing an epic without its Brahmanic insertions, he would be able, third, to draw together ancient Indo-Germanic and Buddhist culture and thus, ultimately, to restore an integral history to the Germanic people (see chart 2.1 for a clarification of these stages).

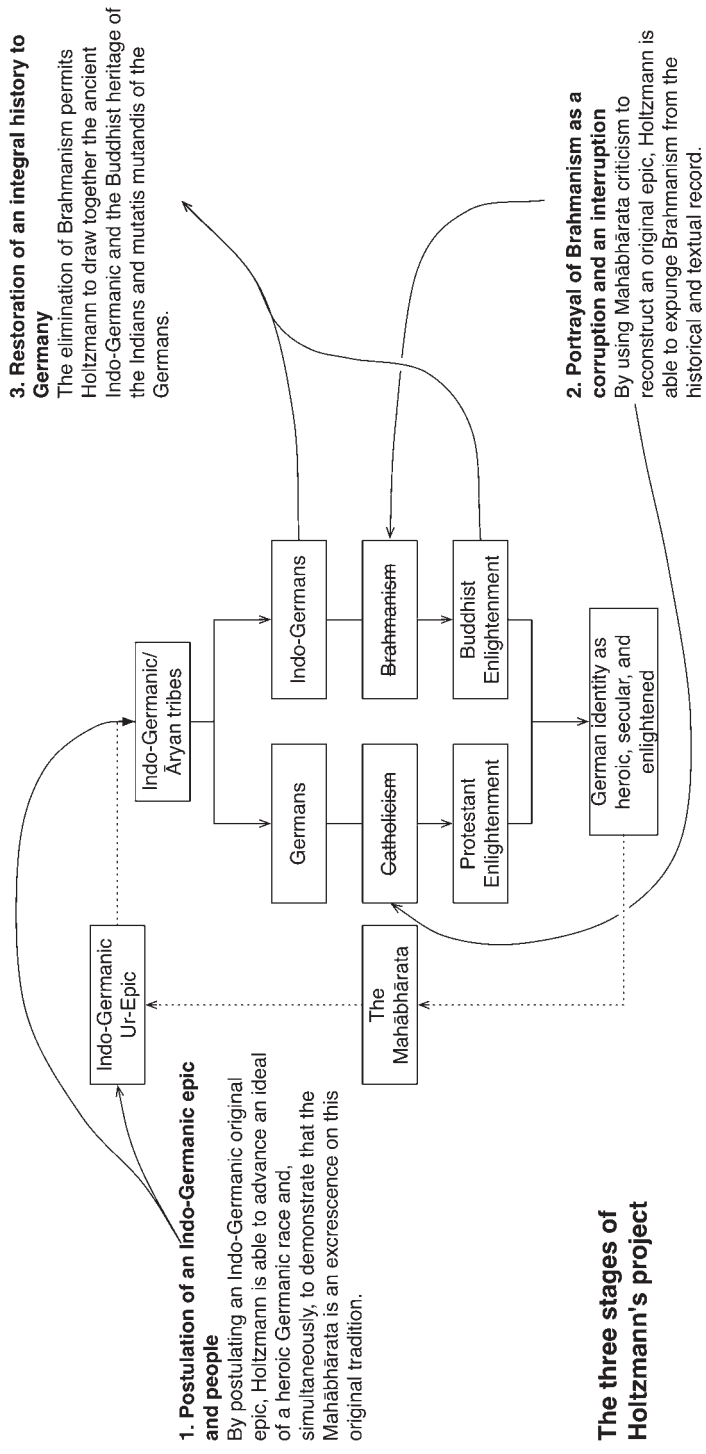


Chart 2.1 Restoring an integral history to Germany: Holtzmann's Mahābhārata in the context of his nationalistic concerns

Although Holtzmann consistently used the language of “Brahmans” and “Indo-Germans” to make his point, there can be little doubt that his ultimate aim was to restore an integral history to Germany itself. First, as we have seen, Brahmanism and Buddhism functioned in his account as ciphers for Catholicism and Protestantism. Second, it would make no sense to restore an integral history to the Indo-Germans, since, by his own admission, they were a vanished culture. In a sense, the entire reconstruction of the Mahābhārata had been undertaken solely for purposes related to Germany’s present. For reasons we may never know, he seems to have experienced the Catholic period as a wound within German consciousness; by projecting his feelings regarding Catholicism outward onto Indian history, he found a way to deal with this trauma. By drawing together the lips (Indo-Germanic and Buddhist) of the wound left by the Brahmanic interruption of the textual transmission, he sought to heal a wound internal to German identity itself: the text as plaster for the fractured German soul. The exact if artificial mirroring between German and Indian history in Holtzmann’s account shows just how intimately bound up the Indian text had become with German ideas of history, of selfhood, and of nationality. Nowhere would this be more evident than in his comments regarding race.

IDEAS OF RACIAL CONTAMINATION

As we saw in the last chapter, from its earliest beginnings, German Mahābhārata studies have been premised on the principle of a racial distinction between the combatants in the Mahābhārata war. This distinction, first introduced in 1837 in the work of the Norwegian Christian Lassen, amounted to no less than a reading of Indian history in terms of race, specifically in terms of the superiority of the “white” race.¹⁴² Holtzmann, too, borrowed this principle, although he built it up into a much more systematic account. As we have seen, the central principle of his reconstruction was the idea of a reversal in the epic’s sympathies. As he put it,

According to the older poem, right and virtue is on the side of *Karṇa* and his party; according to the younger [poem], on that of *Arjuna*; *Duryodhana* is the lawful king, *Arjuna* and his brothers rebels, *Karṇa* is the embodiment of the knightly battle-code, *Kṛṣṇa* always advises trickery and deception: this is the stand-point of the old poem.¹⁴³

142. For the central role played by Lassen in the creation of a “white” race, see McGetchin, *Indology, Indomania, and Orientalism*, 164. The key role played by Lassen in the development of modern ideas of race is not a matter of dispute, but what is less often noted is the central role the Mahābhārata played in his reconstructions of ancient Indian history. If the racism of Gobineau is unimaginable without Lassen’s researches, it is equally true that Lassen’s researches are unimaginable without the Mahābhārata.

143. Holtzmann Jr., *Zur Geschichte und Kritik*, 14.

As for the reasons for this reversal, Holtzmann proposed that the solution to the puzzle of “how one . . . came to leave the old interpretation and to take up the new, opposed [interpretation]” had to be sought “there where Indian history has its genuine ground, the field of history of religion.” More specifically, he proposed that “it was Vishnuism that demanded and enforced this transformation.”¹⁴⁴ But when we take a closer look at this answer, we find it insufficient. How could Holtzmann, on the one hand, claim that Buddhism was an organic outgrowth of Indo-Germanic tradition and, on the other, insist that Brahmanism was a perversion of the latter? What separated Brahmanism from Buddhism or the Indo-Germanic tradition? It could not be that the Brahmins had brought about changes in the text: as he explicitly acknowledged, the epic tradition has always been in a state of flux. And as he noted, “every dynasty seeks to link itself up with the old epic ruling houses in some way.”¹⁴⁵ Likewise, it could not be the fact that Brahmanism was further removed in time from the Indo-Germanic epic tradition for—in some versions of his account at least—Brahmanism preceded Buddhism. It was—again, only in some versions—in direct competition with the heroic world. What made Buddhism consonant with heroic Indo-Germanic ethics, but not Brahmanism?

A second, related problem concerns the identity of the revisionists. Although Holtzmann initially considered the possibility that a “ruling line” might have “linked its ancestry to Arjuna and thus created favorable conditions for the biased revision,” this alone does not suffice to explain the reversal. Our concern here is not with the name of the line that claimed descent, via Parikṣit, from Arjuna, but with the name of the ruler responsible for ensuring that Arjuna and his allies were portrayed in a more favorable light in the revision. More specifically, why would the new ruler or dynasty have resorted to a revision (in the course of which the epic’s polarity of good and evil was reversed), when he or it could much more easily have associated their names with the heroes of the old epic? Even if we are to believe Holtzmann’s theory of a new rising power (call it Brahmanism) which wished to take over the old epic, why not simply map oneself on to the existing power-political and ethical distinctions in the epic? What made it imperative that the epic henceforth advance the cause of the Pāṇḍavas? The obvious solution for any new claimant to power in northern India would have been to claim the mantle of the Kaurava line. However, Holtzmann rejected such a solution on grounds of race. In his opinion, the Pāṇḍavas were “a not pure Aryan tribe, [but] a thieving hill-folk [räuberisches Gebirgsvolk] . . . that advanced victorious from the North.” Indeed, he argued that Pāṇḍavas were “not originally . . . blood-relatives [Blutsverwandte] of the Kauravas,”¹⁴⁶ suggesting that any association with the Kauravas in the epic was a *fortiori* impossible on racial grounds. If the Pāṇḍavas in the epic were, in fact, portrayed as relatives of the Kauravas, then that was a fabrication of later authors, wishing to endow this non-Āryan tribe with a suitable pedigree. Holtzmann further underscored the Pāṇḍavas’ status as interlopers by claiming that their father Pāṇḍu or the White One

144. Ibid.

145. Ibid., 95.

146. Ibid., 33.

(from whom their patronym Pāṇḍava derives) “was freshly invented and grafted into the old genealogy.”¹⁴⁷ As he saw it, the reason for this subterfuge was to posit a hypothetical “white” ancestor, thus making it possible for the Pāṇḍavas to claim Āryan ancestry:

The Pāṇḍava (i.e., the five brothers, but likely not their father Pāṇḍu) belong already to the old legend and played a major role in the original Mahābhārata. In the revision, they appear as cousins of the chiefs of the opposing side. In the old poem, they were impossibly related to their enemies; they were first grafted into the old dynasty at a place and time when they were the ruling royal dynasty. That they did not belong to the old dynasty is, in my opinion, irrefutably clear from the custom predominant among them of polyandry; in reference to this Yudhisṭhira expressly invokes the example of his ancestors.... [But] if the five brothers and their description as Pāṇḍava already belong to the old legend and to the old poem, things probably stand otherwise with their father Pāṇḍu. This name and the figure who bears it was first invented by the revisionists, “we are forced to [reach] the conclusion that the Pāṇḍavas existed earlier than their father Pāṇḍu” (Ludwig myth. Element s. 9).¹⁴⁸

In defense of this hypothesis of the invention of Pāṇḍu, Holtzmann cited three sources: Christian Lassen (1800–76), Albrecht Weber (1825–1901), and Alfred Ludwig (1832–1912). Weber in his *Indische Studien* of 1853¹⁴⁹ had described the Pāṇḍavas as a “thieving hill folk” (“räuberisches Bergvolk”) and claimed that, advancing from the north, they had conquered a large part of India. He also suggested that the Pāṇḍavas were inserted later into the text, possibly under an assumed name.¹⁵⁰ Holtzmann was clearly influenced by Weber’s work. He referred to the Pāṇḍavas as a “thieving hill folk” (“räuberisches Gebirgsvolk”) and also borrowed the latter’s theory of the invention of the Pāṇḍavas. In contrast, Ludwig in his “Über das Verhältnis des mythologischen Elements zur historischen Grundlage des Mahabharata”¹⁵¹ advocated a mythic explanation of the name Pāṇḍu. Although Holtzmann cited his work, he clearly found his symbolic approach less appealing than a historical one. But of the

147. *Ibid.*, 143.

148. *Ibid.*, 128–29.

149. Albrecht Weber, *Indische Studien. Beiträge für die Kunde des indischen Alterthums*, vol. 2 (Berlin: Ferd. Dümmler’s Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1853); see esp. 402–4.

150. “I tend to the opinion that the inclusion of the name of the Pāṇḍava in the old legend of the Mahābhārata was an entirely random [decision], occasioned merely by the fact that the latter work emerged at a time and in a land where Pāṇḍu, [or the] Pāṇḍava were the *current* rulers, in whose honor [then] their name and likely also actual historical elements of their history were brought into association with the ancient legends of gods and heroes....” *Ibid.*, 402.

151. Alfred Ludwig, “Über das Verhältnis des mythologischen Elements zur historischen Grundlage des Mahabharata,” *Abhandlungen der Königlich Böhmisches Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften* 6, no. 12 (1884); see also his “Über die mythische Grundlage des Mahābhārata,” *Sitzungsberichte der Königlich Böhmisches Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften* 9 (1895): 1–26; both discussed in Alf Hildebeitel, “Kṛṣṇa in the Mahābhārata: A Bibliographic Essay,” *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* 60 (1979): 65–110.

three, it is the Norwegian Lassen who proved to be most useful to Holtzmann, since he had already advocated that the “names *Pāṇḍu* and *Kṛṣṇa*, *white* and *black*, ... [were] a reference to the two races that fought each other in Indian prehistory, the original native black and the light-skinned, Sanskrit-speaking interlopers from the North...”¹⁵² Lassen had further advocated that “when it has once been proven that in the history of the Pāṇḍava, names are present that do not signify individuals but conditions and events, then we may extend this statement to the other descriptions of this kind as well. As such are especially prominent the names *black* and *white* in the history of the sons of Pāṇḍu,”¹⁵³ and he continued:

Since the Pāṇḍāla assuredly belonged to the Aryan races, we may not interpret the relationship between them and the Pāṇḍava as though these ought to be described as belonging to the black aborigines of India on the basis of the black color that is attributed to Kṛṣṇā, these [others] as the white Aryans. Nonetheless, the distinction according to color must have a significance and this can only be that the Pāṇḍāla, like the Jādava, who are represented by Kṛṣṇa, both belonged to the Aryan races who entered [India] earlier, [and] became darker through the influence of the climate as compared to the youngest entrants from the north, and in contrast to these are called the black.¹⁵⁴

On the basis of these reflections, Lassen concluded that the names Kṛṣṇa, Pāṇḍu, and Arjuna could not have been names of “real individuals,” but rather, must have been intended as descriptions of “conditions and historical relationships.”¹⁵⁵ Setting out from these ideas of historical interpretation, Holtzmann took up Lassen’s theory of a racial conflict in Indian prehistory, but introduced a unique twist in it: the names Pāṇḍu and Arjuna were, of course, not references to real people, but they also could not be read straightforwardly as indications of the historical situation. Rather, Holtzmann proposed, the Brahmans, having understood the benefits associated with having a white pedigree, undertook to craft precisely such a pedigree for the non-Āryan Pāṇḍavas. Whereas the latter, he conceded, were a real tribe and had, so he thought, conquered and displaced the old heroic tribe of the Kauravas, he was adamant that Pāṇḍu himself was an invention. The Mahābhārata refers to Pāṇḍu as having been pale-skinned at birth (the name “Pāṇḍu” literally means “the white one”) and scholars have speculated that he might have been an albino.¹⁵⁶ Holtzmann, however, coming at the Mahābhārata from the perspective of Lassen’s pseudohistorical ethnographic researches,¹⁵⁷ took this as evidence of a racial inversion in the epic. To

152. Lassen, “Beiträge,” 75.

153. Lassen, *Indische Alterthumskunde*, vol. 1, 2nd ed., 789.

154. *Ibid.*, 791.

155. *Ibid.*, 803.

156. Most recently Wendy Doniger in *The Hindus: An Alternative History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 294.

157. “The Dekhanistic Indians too have the Caucasian physiognomy and form, their skin color is darker than that of the Aryans, without attaining the black of the Negroes, their language, in contrast, is fundamentally different. Furthermore, they are of Mongoloid origin. There could thus have occurred a mixing with the Aryans and thereby a transformation of

his mind, it was self-evident that the non-Āryan, dark-skinned primitive Pāṇḍavas¹⁵⁸ had upended the racial order of the old epic, and perhaps the natural order as well (see chart 2.2 for a clarification of the role played by race in Holtzmann's project). Henceforth, the task of criticism would be to undo not only the contamination of the text, but that of the Germanic race as well.

EVALUATING HOLTZMANN'S TEXTUAL PROJECT

This brief survey of Holtzmann's Mahābhārata has brought to light a number of problems with his work. Starting from his polemics against the Brahmins in section 2, we carefully traced his views of the epic proceeding via his ideas of the epic's composition and historical context all the way to his ideas of racial contamination. In this last section, it finally became clear how, starting from his criticisms of the Brahmins, Holtzmann's project was essentially grounded in a racial prejudice. Holtzmann's antipathy toward Catholicism no doubt played a role in his criticism of Brahmanism,

the type; one could imagine in this case that the small ugly inhabitants of the forest with Dravidian language still preserved this type." Lassen, *Indische Alterthumskunde*, vol. 1, 2nd ed., 488.

"The ethnographic viewpoint already shows the Aryan race as the most important and the dominant, as the cultural race of India; it is the actual object of Indian history; its changing fates, their causes and effects are to be researched by us in the following investigations. . . . What, however, is to be determined here, when it can be determined, are the characteristics that belonged to the race independent of the historical development and are therefore unchangeable and condition precisely the uniqueness of the[ir] historical development. These are of two types: we must recognize that the physical conditions of its existence exercise an enduring influence on the consciousness of a race and, through this, contribute essentially to the formation of its basic character; to be sure, where we must assume a resettlement in a new homeland, this influence does not belong to the original formative elements, but shows up so early in our case [i.e., the Āryans in India], that it cannot be distinguished from an original [element]. In contrast, it would be a great mistake to believe that physical influences alone determine the fundamental character of a race; India like other countries shows this clearly enough; the Dekhanistic and the Vindhja-races stood under the same influences of nature as the Āryans; [but they] have, however, never raised themselves up independently to a higher development. We must thus recognize a foundation of character, an original spiritual predisposition among the races, which is developed and more closely determined, aided or hindered by the external nature of the country as well as through historical events; it is the genius of the races placed [in them] by Creation, which gives form to its unique form under the influence of nature and according to the course of history." Ibid., 490–91.

158. Holtzmann did not explicitly refer to the skin color of the non-Āryan races. However, his use of terms such as "Eingeborene" (native) and "Ureinwohner" (aborigine) to characterize the Brahmanic and local traditions, which he contrasted with those of the "Einwanderten" (invaders or immigrants), suggests that he took seriously Lassen's idea of a racial distinction. Further, his descriptions of the Indo-Germanic warriors, especially his comparison of epic characters with heroes from the Nibelungenlied, leave little doubt that he considered the Kauravas of the old epic to be of Germanic origin. References to the "dark" gods and customs of "Malaya country" (a reference to south India) also suggest that Holtzmann, like all Indologists of the day, took seriously the suggestion of northern India as the homeland of the Āryan people.

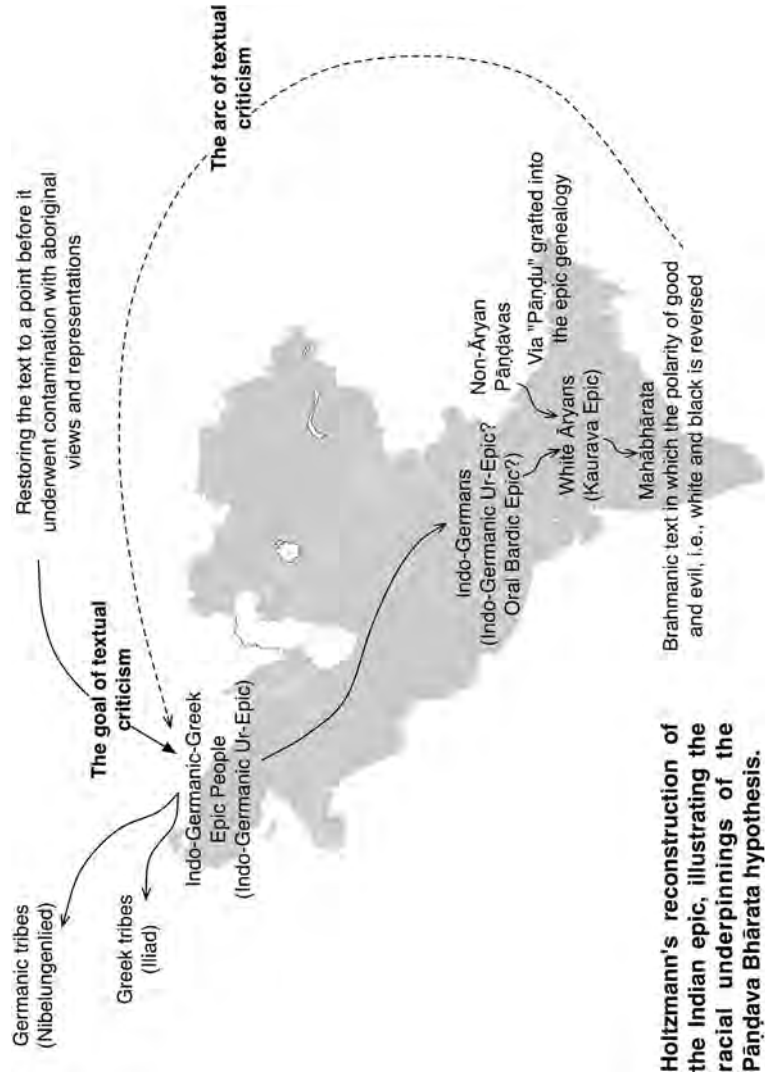


Chart 2.2 The migration of the epic peoples and the successive transformations in the epic

but both Catholicism and Brahmanism became objects of his venom, because he felt them to have betrayed the German people in some way. It is not necessary to dwell any longer here on the racial, political, and evangelical dimensions of Holtzmann's project. However, before we conclude our look at his *Mahābhārata*, it is important to take a survey his ideas of the epic's textual history. Notwithstanding its problematic political aspects, is there anything of scientific value in these reconstructions?

We shall focus here on a trio of characters central to Holtzmann's theories of the epic's evolution: the Kaurava leader Duryodhana; his confidant and accomplice Aśvatthāman; and Kṛṣṇa. As these characters are at the core of Holtzmann's reconstructions, by looking at the way they have been portrayed in the text, we will simultaneously be able to assess the value of these reconstructions.

According to Holtzmann, Aśvatthāman is, "next to Karna," the figure "treated with the greatest favor in the old poem." In support of this, he cited a passage from the epic in support, according to which, "Brahman summoned up in his mind all the excellences of man as he created Aṣvatthāman 9, 6, 12 = 303."¹⁵⁹ This preferential treatment of Aśvatthāman in the "old poem," however, is not the only reason Holtzmann was interested in him. Even more significant is the fact that, according to Holtzmann, Aṣvatthāman is one of the most "Buddhist" characters in the epic. He wrote: "other Buddhist traces are found in the sections dedicated to the story of Aṣvatthāman. His name sounds like the holy fig tree of the Buddhists (*aṣvattha*); his father *Droṇa* has the same name as a pupil of the *Buddha*, the same pupil who labored to distribute the bones of the deceased master (Wheeler III 143); he [i.e., Aṣvatthāman] has the patronym *Gautama* in common with the *Buddha* himself."¹⁶⁰ Holtzmann also attached the greatest significance to the story of Aśvatthāman's head jewel, a stone he was said to have been born with and which was endowed with magical properties. Claiming that this stone "remind[s] us of the 'protubérance du crane' (Burnouf Lotus p. 616), which is considered the foremost symbol of the *Buddha* and is described as an 'outgrowth on the center of the skull, [one] that is repeated in all images of the *Buddha*' (Köppen II 433)," Holtzmann argued for seeing Aśvatthāman as the "personification of the overcome Buddhism."¹⁶¹ In other passages, however, he presented Aśvatthāman as the prototype of the Indo-Germanic hero. Arguing that Aśvatthāman, in contrast to the pusillanimous priests of the later epic, had still retained traits of a martial heritage, he argued for seeing him as one of the original epic characters. Thus, he noted of the nighttime episode of the *Sauptikaparvan* in which Aśvatthāman slaughters the sleeping warriors that it was "one of the oldest and most important parts of the *Mahābhārata*; although highly abridged, it is nonetheless remarkably well preserved."¹⁶² Holtzmann also claimed that "the narrative of the nightly revenge of Aṣvatthāman shows us most clearly the deep gulf that separates the older and younger recension from each other; the

159. Holtzmann Jr., *Zur Geschichte und Kritik*, 76–77.

160. *Ibid.*, 111.

161. *Ibid.*, 112.

162. *Ibid.*, 111.

character of the priestly hero is interpreted fundamentally differently in the two.”¹⁶³ Holtzmann clearly considered the character of Aśvatthāman to have been inherited from the old epic, because a little later he wrote that “it was embarrassing to the revisionists that the great villain *Açvatthāman* belonged to the priestly caste, but they let this fact stand as an evil example of Buddhist confusion of the castes: Buddhism is expressly accused of repealing the differences between the castes in the poem *Çaṅkaravijaya* v. 5 and 22 mentioned earlier.”¹⁶⁴ (Curiously, he also thought that Aśvatthāman, cursed by the Nārada and Vyāsa to wander the earth accompanied by a “smell of blood and pus,” recalled “the story of the Wandering Jew [des ewigen Judens],” which, he noted, “until now was considered to be ‘only loosely connected with the Orient’.”¹⁶⁵)

Holtzmann’s assessment of Duryodhana was similarly positive. Calling him a “thoroughly worthy figure,” he wrote that although “in the complete expansion of the poem, as it is now present to us, *Duryodhana* is presented as a coward, . . . no narrative, which is necessary and indispensable for the plan of the work [Holtzmann means the original plan, as hypothesized by him], confirms this unfair judgment; the old traits cannot be completely obscured.”¹⁶⁶ Holtzmann considered the story of the final contest in the battle, a duel of clubs fought between Duryodhana and Bhīma, to be especially revelatory of the attitude of the old poem toward Duryodhana. Arguing that this episode shows “very clearly even in the present version that justice and honest bravery are represented by *Duryodhana*,” Holtzmann thought Duryodhana to be the epitome of the old knightly battle code favored even by the gods. Thus, he wrote that “after his censuring speech to *Bhīmasena*, the warriors present, all of them enemies, pay him vigorous tribute 9, 56, 42 = 3170, the gods call out hail! [Heil] to him 9, 54, 13 = 3089 and let flowers rain down on him 9, 61, 54 = 3442.”¹⁶⁷ As with the figure of Aśvatthāman, Holtzmann had a simple explanation for the negative portrayal of Duryodhana. “If,” he wrote, “as was suggested above, *Açoka* was glorified in the figure of king *Duryodhana*, then it is natural that the Brahmins later placed the image of *Duryodhana* in the shade.” As Holtzmann acknowledged, “that he [i.e., Duryodhana] was a Buddhist is not said anywhere [in the poem]; this name [i.e., Buddhist] is avoided.” But he remained convinced that the explanation for Duryodhana’s humiliation in the epic could only lie in his having been a heretic. As he put it, “the reason for the harsh judgment is openly acknowledged: *Duryodhana* hates *Kṛṣṇa*, he does not accept his divine origin and character, therefore he is called a wild *Rākshasa* and declared to be ripe for downfall 6, 66, 10 = 2982. 31 = 3003. 7, 11, 41 = 422.”¹⁶⁸ In another passage he pointed out that “his old name, *Suyodhana*, which has often remained (even in unfortunate passages such as 5, 72, 12 = 2592), is mostly turned into *Duryodhana*”¹⁶⁹ and that “according to 1, 115, 28 = 4508 *Duryodhana* brayed

163. Ibid., 120.

164. Ibid., 123–24.

165. Ibid., 112.

166. Ibid., 72.

167. Ibid., 72–73.

168. Ibid., 108.

169. Ibid., 139–40.

like a donkey right after his birth.”¹⁷⁰ Citing the example of Constantine V, who was mocked by his foes for soiling his baptismal font, he argued that “the hatred of heretics can follow its victims all the way into their diapers.” “For, *Duryodhana* is . . . an accursed (3, 10, 32 = 380, by *Maitreya*) heretic, a fosterling of *Çiva* and of the enemies of the gods, who see a defeat of their cause in his death (*svapakshakshaya* 3, 251, 21 = 15144).” Yet, loath to give up his theory of the noble *Duryodhana*, Holtzmann argued that in contrast to these later corruptions, an older passage in the text had “the old gods cry out “Hail!” [Heil] to him.”¹⁷¹

When it came to the third of the epic characters at the crux of his reconstruction, Holtzmann was similarly conflicted. On the one hand, he noted that *Kṛṣṇa*, the “character [who] is probably the most important for the inner critique of the entire epic,” was “in the old narration” “neither god nor king, only chief—neither prominent through birth (“son of a slave” 9, 61, 27 = 3414) nor through nobility of temperament—of a pastoral tribe.” On the other, he was of the opinion that *Kṛṣṇa*’s “cunning” had ultimately decided the war “in favor of *Yudhishtira*, for he kn[ew] how to motivate the reluctant *Arjuna* to act contrary to the traditional precepts of honorable warfare.” “Thus, in the old *Mahābhārata*,” concluded Holtzmann, “he [i.e., *Kṛṣṇa*] plays a very significant but barely honorable role; the race of the *Yādava*, to which he belongs, is considered crude, addicted to being drunk and immoral; he himself is listed by his foes in an emphatic sense among the shepherds and slaves 2, 41, 6 = 1438. 2, 42, 1 = 1474. 2, 45, 4 = 1564. They berate him as a cow-killer 2, 41, 16 = 1448 and accuse him of not following the rules of honest battle 2, 41, 13 = 1445.”¹⁷² This negative assessment of *Kṛṣṇa* continued and, indeed, was heightened when Holtzmann came to speak of the non-epic *Kṛṣṇa*, the *Yādava* hero *Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva*. “The lasciviousness of *Kṛṣṇa*, the alcoholism of his brother *Rāma* (cf. Vish. P. Wilson V 66; also in *Mahābhārata* 1, 219, 7 = 7912 called *kshiba*, which *Nilakaṇṭha* explains as *madhumatta*) and his entire people (cf. Book 16) are familiar traits, which derive from a period in which *Kṛṣṇa* was still just the deified tribal hero of a forceful but crude and sensual pastoral race, [but] had by no means raised himself to a personification of the pantheistic All-Soul.” In contrast, he argued that “the *Kṛṣṇa* of the old *Mahābhārata* [did] not demonstrate precisely these failures, for his enemies would not otherwise have hesitated to blame him for them. But “for all that,” noted Holtzmann, “he [i.e., the epic *Kṛṣṇa*] is a sophist and a faithless politician, and it is difficult to say who did greater harm to the morals of the Indian people, the divine Sophist *Kṛṣṇa* or the divine debauchee *Kṛṣṇa*.”¹⁷³

170. Ibid., 140 and see *ibid.*, 73.

171. Ibid.

172. Ibid., 78.

173. Ibid., 137–38. Although shocking and perhaps even distressing, readers must remember that these comments were made in the context of a tradition of polemics with a long history within German Protestantism. Luther’s fondness for scatological language, for instance, is well documented. Oberman refers to a sermon from 1515 in which Luther declares, “A backbiter does nothing but chew with his teeth the excrements of other people and sniff at their filth like a swine. Thus, human feces becomes the greatest pollutant, topped only by *Teuffels Dreck*.” In the course of the sermon, Luther’s passion rises to a

Other passages focused on working out the contrast between the epic Kṛṣṇa and the epic (Kaurava) heroes. For instance, he argued that whereas “the heroes saw war... as a knightly sport [and] as an honest duel,”¹⁷⁴ Kṛṣṇa represented the values of a new, less scrupulous age, “this is the judgment of the old poem, as spoken 9, 60, 28 = 3367 by the brother of Kṛṣṇa, Rāma the son of Vāsudeva: ‘The honest one has been defeated in a dishonest manner.’”¹⁷⁵ In his opinion, Kṛṣṇa “plan[ned] all the attacks [that are] faithless and unspeakable according to the old concepts of honorable warfare while the Pāṇḍava carr[ied] them out, occasionally Arjuna after some reluctance, occasionally Bhīmasena without further compunction.”¹⁷⁶ It is not exactly clear where, for Holtzmann, the divide lay between the old epic Kṛṣṇa, a scheming politician to be sure, and the Brahmanic Kṛṣṇa, incarnation and protagonist of the

frenzy, until he breaks into German and cries, “‘Sehet wie hat sich der beschissen’—see how he covered himself with shit—then the effective answer is, ‘Das frissestul’—stuff it, eat it yourself.” Cited and translated in Heiko Oberman, “Teufelsdreck: Eschatology and Scatology in the ‘Old’ Luther,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 19, no. 3 (1988): 443. Oberman also notes that in the compendium volume to Luther’s *Passional Christi und Antichristi*, “at the same time the graphic illustration of Luther’s last and most ferocious writing against the papacy, *Wider das Papsttum zu Rom, vom Teufel gestiftet*, Luther addresse[d] the pope as ‘du unverschampts lügen maul, lester [!] maul, Teufels maul,’ because he has produced stinking shit laws that smell to heaven, namely his *Dreckt and Drecketal*. This woodcut sequence of 1545, usually referred to as the *Papstspotbilder* and regarded as conclusive proof for the anal vulgarity of a sick and bitter old man, opens with the presentation of the birth of the antichrist out of the lower intestines of the devil, and concludes with two woodcuts showing the most effective way to deal with the pope, by directing a *Pfurtz*, or farts, against his ban, and releasing feces in his tiara. In this way, as the Latin caption advises: *Adoratur Papa Deus Terrenus*.” Ibid., 443–44 (for the relevant images, see p. 184 of this book). Finally, Luther was not alone in the use of scatological language as a rhetorical device. In response to his *Contra Henricum Regem*, a diatribe against Henry VIII in which Luther suggested that the English king ought to be smeared in shit, Sir Thomas More wrote: “But meanwhile, for as long as your reverend paternity will be determined to tell these shameless lies, others will be permitted, on behalf of his English majesty, to throw back into your paternity’s shitty mouth, truly the shit-pool of all shit, all the muck and shit which your damnable rottenness has vomited up, and to empty out all the sewers and privies onto your crown divested of the dignity of the priestly crown, against which no less than against the kingly crown you have determined to play the buffoon. In your sense of fairness, honest reader, you will forgive me that the utterly filthy words of this scoundrel have forced me to answer such things, for which I should have begged your leave. Now I consider truer than truth that saying: ‘He who touches pitch will be wholly defiled by it’ (Sirach 13:1). For I am ashamed even of this necessity, that while I clean out the fellow’s shit-filled mouth I see my own fingers covered with shit. But who can endure such a scoundrel who shows himself possessed by a thousand vices and tormented by a legion of demons, and yet stupidly boasts thus: ‘The holy fathers have all erred. The whole church has often erred. My teaching cannot err, because I am most certain that my teaching is not my own but Christ’s,’ alluding of course to those words of Christ, ‘My words are not my own but His who sent me, the Father’s’ (John 12:49)?” Thomas More, *Responsio ad Lutherum*, in *The Yale Edition of The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, vol. 5, ed. John M. Headley (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1969), 311–13.

174. Holtzmann Jr., *Zur Geschichte und Kritik*, 79.

175. Ibid., 80.

176. Ibid.

Brahmanic system of values. But in the latter parts of his work, he demonstrated a definite tendency to shade the epic Kṛṣṇa into the Brahmanic Kṛṣṇa. Thus he wrote,

Kṛṣṇa and his pupils gladly cite sentences from the scriptures in justification of their faithlessness, old proverbs and holy verses, the example of the gods, religious and philosophical teachings, which they then interpret and apply according to their convenience. The old mythology, founded as little as that of Homer on a moral basis, offered enough examples that the politicians could invoke; may God speedily purify the minds of my countrymen from the corruptness which such tales are too apt to produce, calls out the admirable Rammohun Roy, after he has listed such accounts. Translations of books of the Vedas 2nd ed. London 1832 p. 189. *Kṛṣṇa* invokes such examples; *Indra* and the other gods too, he says, have in battles with their enemies not scorned the weapons of deceit and of treason 9, 58, 5 = 3250.¹⁷⁷

In another passage he accused Kṛṣṇa and his followers of changing “the old saying: where justice is, there too is victory” into “where *Kṛṣṇa* is, there is justice and victory.” According to him, the new poem “summarily rejected” “reflections about justice and falsehood as being dangerous.” These were, he concluded, “the fundamental principles according to which *Kṛṣṇa* and his followers act, by means of which they triumph; they stand in glaring contrast to the knightly outlook and way of acting of *Karna* and his comrades, to whom nothing is more hateful than falsehood and breach of promise; they represent the old principle of honest battle, [while] these [i.e., the Pāṇḍavas] are representatives of a new principle, of a faithless politics.”¹⁷⁸ But here, too, Holtzmann did not see these values as being uncontested. In his judgment,

the difficulty *Kṛṣṇa* has in teaching *Arjuna* his principles, the sharp rebuke *Arjuna* receives from the other warriors due to his actions, who accuse him of consorting with the low-minded *Kṛṣṇa* (“who can behave thus, if he is not a friend of *Kṛṣṇa*?” 7, 142, 86 = 5964), [and] the condemnation *Rāma* the son of *Vāsudeva* gives voice to, [and], on the other hand, the emphasis *Duryodhana* places on the fact that he has gone the path of the fathers 9, 5, 30 = 268, all this clearly shows that at least in the poet’s representation of the *dharmayuddha*, the honest battle is the custom of the ancient knightly age, the faithless politics of *Kṛṣṇa*, however, appears as a newly arising principle.¹⁷⁹

These characterizations of *Duryodhana*, *Aśvatthāman*, and Kṛṣṇa offered Holtzmann a way to concretize the epic’s genesis. After all, what could be more self-evident than that the Brahmans, finding a heroic warrior epic before them, had to change the roles and/or identities of various characters in order to bring the text more in line with their views. Since Lassen, Western scholars had been unanimous in declaring the *Mahābhārata* to have originally been a Kṣatriya text. Indeed,

177. Ibid., 84–85.

178. Ibid., 87.

179. Ibid., 87–88.

Goldstücker had declared that, as the “record of the greatest martial event of ancient India” the Mahābhārata “would as naturally threaten to depress that of the first or Brahmanical caste” as it offered “an exaltation of kingly splendour and of the importance of the military caste.”¹⁸⁰ Drawing on the work of these scholars, Holtzmann naturally thought he had found the most plausible model of how these changes would have occurred in the text. Suyodhana, the heroic leader of the Kauravas, the honest party of the old epic, would become Duryodhana, the wicked prince opposed to Kṛṣṇa and his followers. Aśvatthāman, the heroic Brahman warrior of the old epic, would retain his identity as a Brahman, but his actions would now be interpreted in light of the new ideology as a betrayal of Brahmanism and this, too, would be retained as evidence of the dangers of confusion of caste. Kṛṣṇa, the scheming politician of the old epic, would become Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva, the drunken, lascivious folk hero, and still later Kṛṣṇa, the Brahmanic god entrusted with offering divine sanction to the actions of the encroacher Pāṇḍavas. The rewrite of the epic would be complete, the old heroic tradition all but wiped out, and a new dominant ideology—that of Brahmanism—installed in its place.

But although this narrative has a certain superficial plausibility, it is when we look closer at the mechanics of Holtzmann’s reconstruction that certain problems crop up. First, there is the problem that Holtzmann cannot logically explain how the Brahmins would have revised the epic, when no written text existed of it. An oral bardic tradition cannot be “revised” in the same way as a written text. It can at most be added to or embellished, and while it may change with time, there is no way to attribute this shift to a definite moment in time, or, indeed, to a definite band of “redactors.” Second, there is the problem that if the Indo-Germanic epic existed only in the form of an oral bardic tradition (i.e., as a plurality of narratives dealing with individual conflicts or acts of heroism), there could have been no question of rewriting the narrative. There must have been at least one central narrative, a narrative that summed up the essence of the heroic world such that it would make sense for the Brahmins to rewrite it. Holtzmann’s solution to the problem was to aver that, at some stage in its history, the Indo-Germanic epic tradition indeed underwent textualization, either at the hands of an Indo-Germanic or a Buddhist poet. But this only introduced further complications into his narrative.

Consider, for instance, the first scenario: that there existed a written composition with a definite theme. If, as Holtzmann suggested, an anonymous bard had undertaken to portray “the tragic struggle of two principles—of knighthood, whose time is over, and of the newly arising politics,”¹⁸¹ he could only have done so if the Indo-Germanic period had been directly followed by the Brahmanic period. Further, the Brahmanic characters in the epic need not then have been introduced by the Brahmanic redactors. If the poet’s aim was to portray the conflict between the Indo-Germanic and Brahmanic worlds, he would have needed to include at least some Brahmanic characters in his narrative. At times, as for instance, when Holtzmann speaks of the epic Kṛṣṇa, he seems to advocate precisely this solution. Brahmanism

180. Goldstücker, “Hindu Epic Poetry: The Mahābhārata,” 98.

181. Holtzmann Jr., *Zur Geschichte und Kritik*, 89.

was well known to the Indo-Germans, who were engaged with it in a hardbitten struggle for superiority. On this scenario, we can at most imagine that the Brahmins, finding upon victory an epic revolving around the conflict between the Indo-Germanic and Brahmanic worlds, would have reversed the polarity in the epic, that is, made the victorious Indo-Germans into the losers and adapted the story to present the Brahmins as triumphant. This is, in fact, something Holtzmann explicitly argues for with his (or, rather, his uncle's) infamous inversion hypothesis. But there arises a problem here: if the old Indo-Germanic poet truly wanted to present "the tragic struggle of two principles," if he truly wanted to show that "knighthood[']s . . . time [was] over," what sense would it make to portray the Indo-Germans as emerging victorious out of the war? Surely, if the knight, as Holtzmann says, is to be presented "to us in all the glory of a setting sun,"¹⁸² it must always have been the losing side in the epic. So now it seems that the most the Brahmins could have done upon gaining victory was to ensure that "the old honest battle-ethics of the knights" were not presented as "succumb[ing] to treason and deceit,"¹⁸³ but to legitimate tactics and superior skill. But this we know emphatically not to have been the case, for Holtzmann himself cites many examples where the Brahmins present instances of treason and deceit. If they rewrote the epic, it seems their intent was not at all to present Kṛṣṇa and the Pāṇḍavas as flawless heroes. Add to this the problem that Holtzmann vacillates between whether the Indo-Germanic bard came up with a poetic composition, intended to evoke tragic effects, or with a historical account, which was merely tragic as a side effect, and it is clear that the bardic composition hypothesis does not get us very far in explaining the epic's genesis.

But Holtzmann's second scenario, that the oral epic was first written down in the Buddhist period, is not much better. If a Buddhist poet was responsible for the textualization of the epic, this epic cannot have been concerned with the conflict between the Indo-Germanic and Brahmanic worlds. In this conflict, Brahmanism would have won and taken over the Indo-Germanic epic and it is this epic the Buddhist poet would have had to revise. His would have been the second textualization—a revision, in fact—and not the first, as Holtzmann explicitly argues. If, however, we take the alternative that the Buddhist poet "extracted a single narrative from the legendary materials present [to him]" and "refashioned" it "to an independent artistic composition, to the *Mahābhārata* (according to its oldest form),"¹⁸⁴ then Brahmanic elements could only have entered the epic after the end of the Buddhist period. There is no scenario in which the Brahmins could have taken over the epic, handed it over to the Buddhists, and then asked for it back. Then there is the problem that if Brahmanism had not entered on the stage as yet and the *Mahābhārata* was not as yet a vehicle of religious rhetoric, there is no plausible reason why a Buddhist (!) would undertake to preserve the memory of blood-drinking, wife-bartering Indo-Germans. In spite of Holtzmann's efforts to present the Indo-Germanic and Buddhist traditions

182. Ibid.

183. Ibid.

184. Ibid., 67.

as congenial, there is no scenario in which we can imagine the former as following seamlessly into the latter.¹⁸⁵

Here is where Holtzmann's account rapidly begins to unravel. It seems he hated Brahmanism so much that he was unsure whether to make the epic an instrument of the Brahmanic campaign against the Buddhists or an instrument of the Brahmanic campaign against the Indo-Germans. He wanted, on the one hand, to tie the Indo-Germans to the Buddhists. The thesis that a Buddhist poet would have "out of the mass of legends handed down, placed a particularly outstanding [example] in the center, artistically grouped others in the form of episodes around this [one], sharply delineated the characters, and let them collide against each other in a tragic conflict,"¹⁸⁶ seems to have offered him a way of doing so. This collusion, furthermore, had the advantage that he could now imagine the Brahmanic counterresponse as being one single response, directed against both parties of the alliance. If the Indo-Germanic and Buddhist poet were one and the same, no contradiction should arise and it would be easy to imagine the Brahmins, mortal enemies of free-spirited thought as well as of scientific progress, as being bent upon the destruction of this Indo-Germanic Buddhist epic.

In a broad outline, it is clear that this is exactly what Holtzmann had in mind. First, as we have observed, he wished to see Buddhism as the natural successor to Indo-Germanic tradition and Brahmanism as an alien imposition upon this culture. From his hyperbolic criticisms of Brahmanism, it is clear that he saw Brahmanism as the Eastern analogue to Catholicism, which Holtzmann Sr. had already identified as the mortal enemy of the pagan Germans. Second, he clearly thought of Brahmanism as somehow being hostile to the spirit of both Germanism and Buddhism, even though this created extraordinary problems for him regarding where to locate Brahmanism historically. On the one hand, if it came between Indo-German and Buddhist traditions, the former could not have gone over seamlessly into the latter: a Brahmanic interregnum had to be admitted. It was also necessary to locate Brahmanism before Buddhism if the Brahmanic response to Buddhism was to assume the status of a *Counter-Reformation*. On the other hand, if Brahmanism came after Buddhism, there was no reason for it to experience such hostility toward Germanic tradition, since this would now be a tradition that had been buried for some three centuries in Buddhism. There could also not be a direct conflict, tragic or otherwise, between the "kighthood" and the "newly arising politics," with the further consequence that

185. Especially from his comments regarding Duryodhana as king Aśoka, Holtzmann seems to have had in mind Aśoka's conversion to Buddhism following his campaign against Kalinga. Aśoka, a fearsome general and warrior, is said to have become pacific after witnessing the great destruction of the Kalinga war. It seems as though here all the conditions required to imagine a transition from the Indo-Germanic to the Buddhist worlds are truly met. But there is a problem here, because any epic commissioned by a penitent king Aśoka/Duryodhana would have had to culminate in a rejection of violence and a message of peace. The *Mahābhārata*, indeed, does so, ending with the message of *ahimsa* as the highest *dharma*, but then, crucially, it would not be an Indo-Germanic epic, dedicated to preserving the memory of the Indo-Germanic tradition and its heroic values. It would precisely be rejecting those values.

186. Holtzmann Jr., *Zur Geschichte und Kritik*, 68.

the epic would lose what was, according to Holtzmann, its central narrative principle. The only way out of this dilemma was to assume the existence of a common Indo-Germanic-Buddhist epic tradition. Yet, as is clear by now, this assumption is an unsustainable myth. Its only function in Holtzmann's work was to perpetuate the theory of a Catholic/Brahmanic betrayal of the Germanic people. In essence, it provided him a way of projecting his issues with the Roman Catholic church outward—onto Indian history—and thereafter reimporting them in the form of critical scholarship—as a “scientific” account of history.¹⁸⁷

Once we set aside this conflation, the only way to look at Holtzmann's project is to treat these two traditions in isolation from each other (see chart 2.3 for a clarification of the parallel descent of the epic via the Indo-Germanic and the Buddhist compositions). It is here that the contradictions in his theory become especially glaring.

A look at Holtzmann's characterizations of what are, for him, the three central epic characters shows just how absurd his project was. As we have seen, he sought to concretize the process of the epic's transformation in terms of the changes to *Aśvatthāman's*, *Duryodhana's*, and *Kṛṣṇa's* respective identities in the epic. Taking up these three characters as paradigmatic examples for the kinds of changes redactors would have made—and would have needed to make—to the epic, he tried to offer evidentiary support for the Lassen-Goldstücker hypothesis of the epic's origins as a *Kṣatriya* text. But when we look more closely at this attempt, insurmountable problems arise. Take, for example, *Aśvatthāman*. Identified in the earliest stage of Holtzmann's text as a Brahman, he progressively mutates into something quite different: a double-headed Indo-Germanic Buddhist figure. Thus, we read: “In the *Mahābhārata* [Holtzmann means the text in its present form], the classes are already strictly distinguished from each other, but nonetheless not as absolutely closed off from each other as in *Manu* or in *Āpastamba*. In the epic two Brahmins, *Droṇa* and *Açvatthāman*, father and son, play a main role as brave warriors. This fact was not invented by the compilers and redactors, but unwillingly enough taken over from the old poem; that they did not dare to change this relationship [i.e., the fact that they are Brahmins] can have had its reason only in the general prevalence of the legend.”¹⁸⁸ But once Holtzmann introduces the hypothesis of the Indo-Germanic original epic in chapter 6, *Aśvatthāman* takes on a progressively more Indo-Germanic cast. In Holtzmann's words, “Indian and German antiquity simultaneously complement each other. Both races . . . hold the duty of blood-vengeance to be holy . . . one would rather presume to be reading an ancient German legend than a poem from the land of the tender-nerved Indians, when one comes across the narrative in which the revenge of *Açvatthāman* for the treasonous murder of his father *Droṇa* is described.”¹⁸⁹ Peculiarly,

187. This has not stopped others from reviving the Holtzmannian myth. His anti-Brahmanism continues in the work of contemporary scholars such as James L. Fitzgerald. But that is not to say that it is any more tenable. The seductions of the new historicist philology being what they were, scholars have been willing to overlook its anti-Catholic, anti-Semitic implications (see first note in this chapter), but this does not make their work any way more “scientific.”

188. Holtzmann Jr., *Zur Geschichte und Kritik*, 17.

189. *Ibid.*, 49.

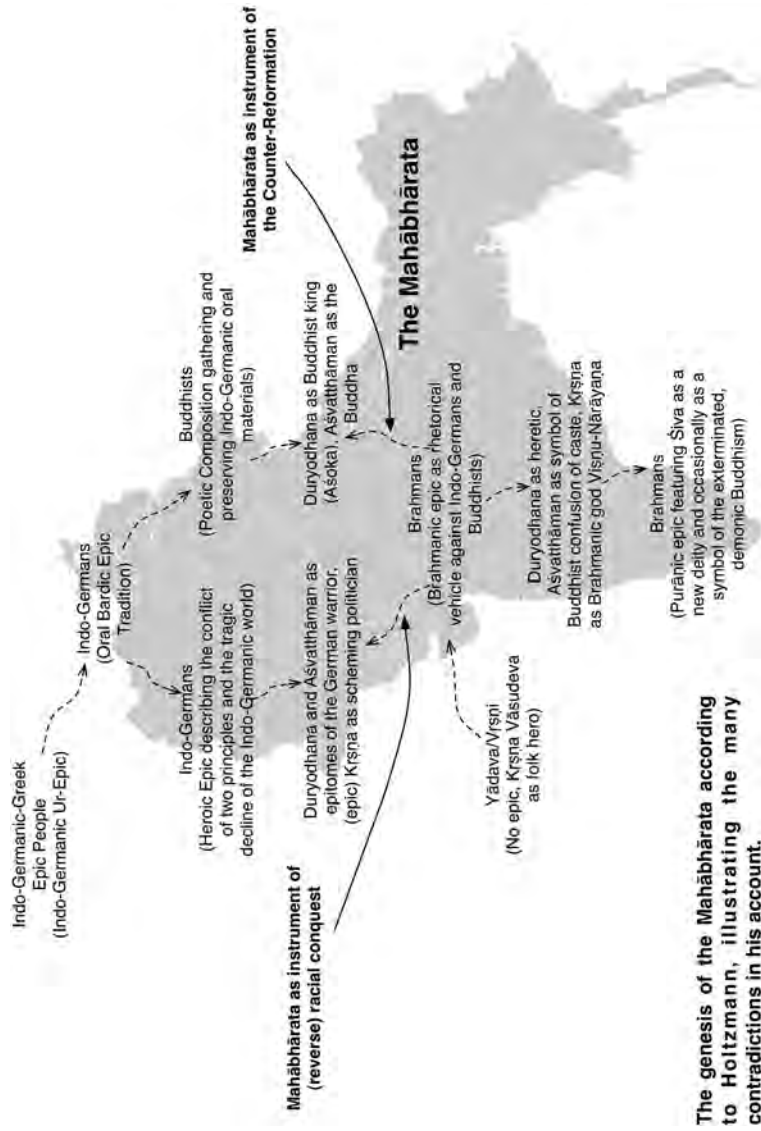


Chart 2.3 The descent of the epic

the fierce Brahmanic warrior begins moving retrogressively relative to the rest of history: he is progressively stripped of his defining Brahman identity, while his warrior side comes increasingly to the fore. But what is a Brahman already doing in the epic, when the emergence of Brahmanism—at least on this account—is at least several centuries away? Furthermore, even if we revert to the first account, where an Indo-Germanic poet composed the epic as a story of the tragic conflict between the Indo-German and Brahman traditions, the martial Brahman could hardly have been on Duryodhana's side. And if it was written into the epic later, when did he acquire Indo-Germanic traits? Even if *Aśvatthāman* was originally present as a pro-German Brahman in the epic and, as Holtzmann avers, the later redactors did not dare to change this fact due to “the general prevalence of the legend,”¹⁹⁰ how does a martial Brahman survive the Buddhist phase?

Things get even more confusing when we consider Holtzmann's account of *Aśvatthāman*'s fate at the hands of the Buddhist composer. Instead of moving backward through history and becoming progressively more Germanic, the character reverses direction and now begins moving forward through history, ultimately mutating into the historical Buddha. This is absurd, because even if we were to imagine that the Buddhist poet chose to confer Buddhist identities on his Indo-Germanic prototypes (in essence, retelling the conflict as a Buddhist *Tripiṭaka* tale), why choose a martial Brahman of all things to be the Buddha in his retelling? According to legend, Gautama Buddha was born to king Śuddhodana of the Śākya. Thus he started life as a Kṣatriya before becoming a renunciate. If the poet's intent, as Holtzmann seems to think, was to endow the epic characters with suitable post-Indo-Germanic world identities, would it not make sense to take an Indo-Germanic warrior as his template? And if *Aśvatthāman*'s Brahman identity is so essential to him that even a “genial” poet could not eliminate it from his narrative, how is it that it conveniently goes under just at those moments when he is the Buddha?

Whatever *Aśvatthāman*'s true identity, Holtzmann placed overwhelming emphasis on his Indo-Germanic and Buddhist traits. Even if originally a Brahman, *Aśvatthāman* so completely internalizes the Indo-Germanic outlook that the later redactors had no choice but to make him a compatriot of Duryodhana's, an evil and sinister figure. (Indeed, from the perspective of the Brahmanic redaction, it makes little difference whether he is Indo-Germanic or Buddhist since, as Holtzmann tells us, he has for all practical purposes, surrendered himself to the devil.¹⁹¹)

Duryodhana's case is even more interesting. In addition to claiming that Suyodhana was an Indo-Germanic hero, Holtzmann also argued for seeing Suyodhana/Duryodhana as king Aśoka. He writes:

If we may seek the great Unknown, the poet of the *Mahābhārata*, at the court of the Buddhist kings of north India, perhaps that of Aśoka or his followers, then it is likely that this poet adduced the religious views of his masters and patrons to his heroes, perhaps glorified the king at whose court he lived precisely in the figure of

190. *Ibid.*, 17.

191. *Ibid.*, 123.

Duryodhana. Then it would also be clear why later the victorious Brahmanism had to invert and present *Karṇa*'s faction from the worst side. One would thus have to investigate whether, even in today's *Mahābhārata*, king *Duryodhana* and his friends are represented as heretics or, even worse, as Buddhists.¹⁹²

If, as suggested above, in the figure of *Duryodhana*, king *Aśoka* was glorified, then it is natural that the Brahmins later placed the image of *Duryodhana* in the shade. That he [i.e., *Duryodhana*] was a Buddhist is of course not said anywhere; this name [i.e., Buddhist] is avoided.¹⁹³

In the figure of *Āśvatthāman*, we found a conflation of Indo-Germanic and Buddhist characteristics (overlaid over a foundation of Brahman identity). *Āśvatthāman*, a fictional character from the old epic, had been refashioned in the Buddhist poet's account to appear as a real, historical character, namely, the Buddha. In the figure of *Duryodhana*, we find a similar conflation of Indo-Germanic and Buddhist characteristics, but with the additional complication that it is now the real, historical character who gives rise to the fictional character. Thus, the historical king *Aśoka* appears to have given rise to the character of *Duryodhana* in the epic, even though—according to the same account—*Duryodhana* or *Suyodhana*, as we must call him, was already present in the epic as an Indo-Germanic hero and opponent of the *Pāṇḍavas*. But in that case, why would the poet have projected a Buddhist identity on to *Duryodhana* in particular? It is one thing to claim that, out of gratitude to his patron, he modelled a character in the epic after him. It is quite another to claim that, out of gratitude, he re-modelled an epic character after him. In the latter case, Holtzmann would have to explain why this character in particular was suited to become the epic prototype of the historical *Aśoka*, and that means, once again, to show what makes the Indo-Germanic and Buddhist traditions congenial. Simply asserting their proximity is not sufficient as a form of reasoning; in fact, it suffers from *petitio principii* since this is precisely what is to be demonstrated.

Even if we overlook this absurdity, other problems remain. If, as Holtzmann argues, the poet “adduced” “the religious views of his masters and patrons to his heroes,” what sense does it make to speak of *Duryodhana* and his associates being “represented” “in today's *Mahābhārata*” as Buddhists? Surely, they would already *be* Buddhists post the first Buddhist composition? Or perhaps we are meant to understand the claim as saying that some traces of *Duryodhana*'s Buddhist origins survived past the Brahmanic redaction. But in that case, why erase *Duryodhana*'s Buddhist qualities at all, if the point was precisely to write a propaganda narrative?

The conflation of the historical *Aśoka* with the fictional *Duryodhana* is also beset with other problems. If *Duryodhana* loses the *Kurukṣetra* war, he can hardly be a model for the victorious *Aśoka*, whose Buddhist trajectory was launched with his brutal suppression of the rival power of *Kaliṅga*. But if he wins the battle at the expense of the slaughter of his cousins, his cousins' offspring, and even the unborn children in the women's wombs, he can hardly provide an appropriate parallel for the

192. *Ibid.*, 105–6.

193. *Ibid.*, 108.

historical personage he supposedly inspired and/or was based on.¹⁹⁴ Whichever way we look at it, it seems Duryodhana and Aśoka must part ways—even without the assistance of Brahman redactors. Holtzmann's attempt to combine two characters with such opposite characteristics once again bears out our claim that his concern here was with neither historical accuracy nor narrative logic. Rather, his guiding aim was to fuse Indo-Germanic and Buddhist culture in some way—a desire that manifests most conspicuously in his evocation of a “secret bond” (“geheimnisvolles Band”) that links Aśoka and Duryodhana:

That a secret bond exists between *Açoka* and *Duryodhana* is also clear from the fact that the accounts of the miraculous birth of *Duryodhana* and his hundred brothers, as the *Mahābhārata* presents it to us, corresponds remarkably with similar legends about *Açoka* and his family. The mother of *Duryodhana*, it is recounted, 1, 115, 1 = 4483 brings a bundle of flesh into the world; this is cut up into a hundred parts, these are preserved in vats and from them arise one hundred sons. . . . *Açoka* too has a hundred brothers Lassen II 213 and his grandfather *Candragupta* (whose identity with *Açoka* has been asserted by Talboys Wheeler) arises with his brothers from a lump of flesh that is born from his mother II 197. Lassen explicitly draws our attention to the similarity of these legends with those of the *Mahābhārata*.¹⁹⁵

The bizarre nature of Holtzmann's assertion ought not obscure the real issues at stake here. As we have seen in preceding sections, one of Holtzmann's central concerns in his *Mahābhārata* was to restore an integral history to Germany, which he did via projecting German history onto India. Thus, Germans appeared as Indo-Germans and Protestantism as Buddhism. In a second step, he then used *Mahābhārata* criticism as a means to construct an alternative history of India, one in which Brahmanism either never appeared or is excised from the historical record such that Indo-Germanic tradition flowed seamlessly into Buddhism. As he reminds us, “Buddhism accept[ed] the entire old mythology; we find *Indra* and *Brahman* worshipped next to *Buddha* (Benfey, Kl. Sch. I 184. Holtzmann Thierkreis pp. 26–27).”¹⁹⁶ In Holtzmann's eyes, this made Buddhism the logical successor to the Germanic tradition. It offered him a way of asserting a continuity to German tradition, which he found missing in European history due to the incursion of Roman Catholicism. Here at last, he thought, was a tradition free from the taint of the “corruption of history [Geschichtsverderbniss]” of the epic tradition. In contrast, the Brahmins, like “Scholastics and Catholic priests,” but unlike Buddhists (and, one presumes, Protestants) had been responsible for a massive falsification of history.¹⁹⁷ It fell to the modern *Mahābhārata* critic to uncover this falsification, which he could do best by deploying the methods of historical criticism.

It is when we turn to the third of Holtzmann's key epic characters, Kṛṣṇa, that we most clearly discover what was entailed in such criticism. First, there was the

194. We thank Alf Hildebeitel for pointing this out (personal communication).

195. Holtzmann Jr., *Zur Geschichte und Kritik*, 106 (Holtzmann's emphasis).

196. *Ibid.*, 116.

197. *Ibid.*, 96.

necessity of denying the divinity of Kṛṣṇa. As Holtzmann put it, “the epic knew of a *Kṛṣṇa*, . . . accorded a very important role, a leader of a pastoral race allied with the *Pāṇḍava*”¹⁹⁸ Second, there was the need to deride and profane the god of the Hindus. Their god, Holtzmann informed them, was “crude, addicted to being drunk and immoral”; he was, furthermore, himself a “cow-killer,” making a nonsense of their ideas of ethics.¹⁹⁹ Indeed, there was no accusation so terrible that Holtzmann would not hurl at Kṛṣṇa’s head. Third, all sorts of pseudohistorical explanations had to be conjured up to explain how Kṛṣṇa could have appeared as a god to the Hindus. Thus, there could be Kṛṣṇa, the epic character; Kṛṣṇa, the folk hero; Kṛṣṇa, the founder of a religious tradition; Kṛṣṇa, the chieftain of the Yādava clan; but there could not be Kṛṣṇa, the all-god. And even if one acknowledged Kṛṣṇa as god, he was at best a particularistic god, the god of the Hindus, who could be explained out of the cultural particularity of this people.²⁰⁰

MAHĀBHĀRATA CRITICISM AFTER HOLTZMANN

Even though Holtzmann offered his vision of the Mahābhārata as a contribution to Mahābhārata criticism (on page 9 he writes that in the “inner criticism of the Mahābhārata is found a problem that is destined to profitably employ many future generations of scholars” and on page 11 he utters his infamous statement about how “the most important principle for the inner criticism of the Mahābhārata” was uttered by his uncle), in reality his work had little to do with what has, since the nineteenth century, usually been understood by the term. Textual criticism, as has been noted, is a mechanical method of reconstruction of archetypes. Glen Most observes,

Lachmann’s method is mechanical, both in the sense that it must presuppose the unthinking transcription of manuscripts if it is to be applied to them and in the sense that the determination of relations of filiation is achieved on the basis of simple rules and calculations of probability. Ideally, choices of manuscripts and of readings based on this method will be rational in that they will depend not on the taste of the individual scholar but on objective evidence that can be mathematized and evaluated.²⁰¹

198. *Ibid.*, 132.

199. *Ibid.*, 78.

200. Holtzmann’s pseudohistorical researches into Kṛṣṇa were carried forward by Hopkins and even more so by Garbe. Their ideas of Kṛṣṇa as an arriviste god find their finest expression in the work of Walter Ruben. See his *Konkordanz und Kommentar der Motive seines Heldenlebens* (Vienna: Adolf Holzhausens Nfg., 1943), and see also Ulrich Scheider, “Kṛṣṇa’s Postumer Aufstieg: Zur Frühgeschichte der Bhakti-Bewegung,” *Saeculum* 33, no. 1 (1982): 38–49; reprinted in *Opera Minora*, ed. Marion Meisig (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 2002), 215–25. Both works are classic examples of the way German Indologists sought to meet the theological challenge posed by alternative ideas of divinity through constructing a narrative of the origin of those ideas in primitive tribes or cults prone to deifying their heroes and/or religious leaders.

201. Most, “Editor’s Introduction,” 10.

Further, the method is based on a method of manuscript comparison and evaluation. As R. Marichal puts it, “our only source are the manuscripts themselves, then, in the final analysis, these stemma. We therefore do not have the right to repudiate their evidence on the pretext that it appears absurd to us.”²⁰² The idea of this new method of textual criticism was that by basing their editorial judgments on the evidence of the codices themselves, scholars would be able to avoid the notorious *emendatio ope ingenii* (correction according to one’s wits), which had been responsible for a number of unattested readings creeping into the tradition. This new *emendatio ope codicum* (correction according to the manuscript sources), as it was called, was held in the nineteenth century to be a major advance. In particular, it greatly reduced the scope for the use of subjective *iudicium*, the bane of nineteenth-century philologists interested in the recovery of historical archetypes.

But what Holtzmann and the other Mahābhārata critics were now proposing went far beyond what a Renaissance scholar might have understood by the use of subjective *iudicium*. Even the most ardent critics of the vulgate Bible in the eighteenth century such as Richard Bentley would not have dreamed of “editing” the Bible so that it became an Indo-Germanic text with later Semitic “interpolations.” And yet, that was precisely what the German critics, led by Holtzmann, were undertaking to do.

Holtzmann and co. might have adopted Bentley’s assertion that “For us, reason and the facts are worth more than a hundred manuscripts.”²⁰³ Except that, in their case, the “reasons and the facts” were the existence of Āryan tribes and a prehistoric conflict that pitted the white race against the black. The next scholar we must consider after Holtzmann, the Bonn Indologist Hermann Oldenberg, overtly distanced himself from Holtzmann’s theses,²⁰⁴ but in reality, actually duplicated most of them. In the process he endowed Holtzmann’s claims with a veneer of scientific legitimacy. Thus, on the very first page of his book, he averred that the Mahābhārata “constitutes the powerful link between old and new India, the India of the Aryan and of the Hindu.” Oldenberg thought that “Indian bards and poets [would have] laid the first foundation for the monstrous poem” that would eventually become “the Mahābhārata, that is, the great poem of the Bhārata-clan.” Like Holtzmann, he thought that the Mahābhārata “began its existence as a simple epic narrative,” but, as he argued, it “grew in the course of the centuries to a monstrous chaos: besides the main narrative there are true primal forests of smaller narratives, besides that countless and endless teachings about theological, philosophical, natural-scientific matters, law, politics, worldly wisdom and practical advice.”²⁰⁵

202. Robert Marichal, “La critique des textes,” in *L’histoire et ses méthodes*, ed. Charles Samaran (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1961), 1285.

203. Cited and translated in Timpanaro, *The Genesis of Lachmann’s Method*, 55. Timpanaro lists the original as Bentley’s edition of Horace (note on *Carm.* 3.27.15) but does not mention which of the two volumes it is in.

204. “Thus, the hypothesis under discussion appears to me to be built up on a foundation that does not suffice by far to carry it. Has one not applied the all too questionable standards of the Christian Middle Ages here to the Oriental work of poetry—excited over the newly discovered Indo-German tradition, seen Germanic tribes in the Indians?” Oldenberg, *Das Mahābhārata*, 37.

205. *Ibid.*, 1.

Oldenberg's judgment, that the Mahābhārata was composed of a mass of heterogeneous narratives, was to become one of the enduring prejudices of modern scholarship. It would not be questioned, for instance, by any German scholar of rank well into the twenty-first century. Later generations of scholars would cite Oldenberg's assessment of the Mahābhārata as settled wisdom, without being aware that this assessment was derived largely from Holtzmann. Holtzmann's rabid assertions would thus enter into the mainstream. Theses such as the assumption of an original heroic bardic epic would become a stock-in-trade of modern Mahābhārata scholars. Scarcely a scholar would bother to inquire into the origins of these prejudices or into what commitments they entailed for the scholar. Like Oldenberg, they would trust in "the highly inconsistently transmitted text of such monstrous value," being, "in the far distance" "purified and secured by the philological art which it has a claim upon."²⁰⁶ But they would not see how that "philological art" itself was corrupt, inasmuch as it set out from the premise of a text in need of purification where "purification" referred not to the emendation of certain readings but to the purging of the epic of its non-Āryan elements.

A brief look at Oldenberg's Mahābhārata suffices to bear this out. For him, too, "northern India, . . . enter[ed] overwhelmingly for consideration for antiquity as the homeland of Aryan culture." He considered the northwest in particular to be the home of the "tribes, of whom the ancient accounts report." "The Vedas arose there, [and] Vedic culture had its seat there." The epic, too, "belongs to the West."²⁰⁷ "Significant and tragic events that occur in its lap are the material of the epic." Calling the epic the story of "a battle between warring cousins," he deliberately excluded all other kinds of materials from purview.²⁰⁸ Following a prejudice by now familiar to us from Holtzmann, he averred that he "fore[went] to trace more closely what is further reported after the main battle—endless teachings, which Yudhiṣṭhira, now consecrated king, receives from Bhīṣma, a wise man, from this hero of the enemy side wounded to the point of death; the royal horse sacrifice, which he performs, and other such things that are narrated in the closing books—unimportant [matters], and of dubious or extremely dubious origin."²⁰⁹ In his opinion, these were all extraneous to the epic's central concern, the battle between the Kauravas and Pāṇḍavas, of which he wrote, "one sees that these are all human occurrences, although portrayed mythically, nonetheless, in the last analysis, quite certainly historical. The heroes of the Mahābhārata are, in this respect, related to Achilles and Agamemnon of Greek epic; [they are] not primordial and superhuman men such as Gilgamesh and Eabani of the Babylonian."²¹⁰

Oldenberg declared that "what offers itself easily and naturally to wide-ranging epic fashioning were human fates, the fates of princely lineages."²¹¹ As he imagined

206. *Ibid.*, 2.

207. *Ibid.*

208. *Ibid.*, 3.

209. *Ibid.*, 6.

210. *Ibid.*

211. *Ibid.*, 7.

it, the epic must have arisen from a circle of legends pertaining to historic personages, narrated retrospectively to the descendant of one of those lineages.

Among the scattered fragments of historical recollection that the later Vedic period has left behind, one is found here, which we may evaluate as more significant and more intelligible.... A royal father and a royal son, both surrounded by great splendor. The poet of a poem preserved in the Atharvaveda tells us where they ruled: over the Kurus, precisely the tribe that stands in the center of the later Vedic period and the Mahābhārata. Its period, too, is tolerably reliably ascertainable. The metrical technique of this poem, its location not in the R̥gveda but in the Atharvaveda, indeed, the frequent mention of both these princes in the later Veda texts, while the R̥gveda knows nothing of them: this all comes together to ascribe them [i.e., the princes] in all likelihood to the period after but probably not much after the R̥gveda, prior to the Brāhmaṇa period.²¹²

Following in the train of the Lassen-Goldstücker hypothesis of epic origins and the Holtzmannian hypothesis of narrative elements being clues to historical circumstances, Oldenberg thought that “even if the narrative of its recitation at Janamejaya’s sacrifice may be fiction and most probably is fiction,” “something correct [must] shine through here all the same.” As he wrote, “does not the genealogical connection of Parikṣit and Janamejaya with those heroes [i.e., the Pāṇḍavas] make a thoroughly believable impression?... And it is, in fact, possible that the first foundation for this poetic composition was laid precisely at Janamejaya’s court, a poem that—naturally, in endlessly transformed form—narrates to us even today of the fight between the Bhāratas.”²¹³

The problem with this assertion is that no scholar had yet shown that the Mahābhārata was a historical account or that it ought to be taken as a historical account. This, too, was a prejudice deriving from the Lassen-Holtzmann school of epic scholarship. For instance, Oldenberg averred of the epic that “we may consider it totally plausible... that events that were more or less similar to the battle of the two heroic lineages actually occurred. Of course, what in the epic, in epic fashion, is narrated as something earth shaking, as the great occurrence of the past, certainly had, in truth, far more modest dimensions....”²¹⁴ Of course, Western scholars were aware of the reception of the text as a work of *smṛti* literature, that is, a work dealing with law, ritual, and philosophy. Before Oldenberg, the Jesuit scholar Fr. Joseph Dahlmann had published a treatise characterizing the Mahābhārata as a work of legal and moral wisdom.²¹⁵ Oldenberg, however, brushed aside these objections. To his

212. Ibid., 8.

213. Ibid., 9.

214. Ibid., 11.

215. Joseph Dahlmann, *Das Mahābhārata als Epos und Rechtsbuch. Ein Problem aus Altindiens Cultur- und Literaturgeschichte* (Berlin: Felix L. Dames, 1895) and see also his later *Die Genesis des Mahābhārata* (Berlin: Felix L. Dames, 1899) defending himself (successfully) against Hopkins’ criticisms. Alternative approaches to the Mahābhārata were available to German scholars, had they wished to take them. Unfortunately, the Jesuit father’s work, too, was brushed aside as not meriting serious consideration (see Oldenberg’s

mind, it was self-evident that the Indians, failing to develop historical research in the same sense as the Egyptians or Babylonians, were incapable of appreciating the true meaning of the text.²¹⁶ As he put it, “narration of stories, as one needed it and as it alone was conceivable at the time, existed . . . precisely as the epic: festive entertainment, moving lore of the κλέα ἀνδρῶν; flattery of the descendants, who as co-possessors had a share in the fame of the ancients.”²¹⁷ In all respects, the Indians showed themselves to be poor caretakers of texts, for,

whether the narrative plays out in the king’s palace or on the battlefield or in the wild forest or the dwelling place of monsters, giants, pious ascetics: overall there could only exist colorfully embellished, wonder-filled occurrence. There, interruptions, ineffectual elements were removed, a context created between what did not belong together, what lay distant brought close and woven into the presentation, above all, [the human faculty of] fantasy’s need to see great heroic figures in the center be satisfied—all this historically and unhistorically alike, beyond truth and falsity.²¹⁸

It is, of course, not necessary to identify Holtzmann as the source of these prejudices. There is not a single Western scholar in the period who might not have expressed similar sentiments regarding the Indians. As a conquered, backward people, it was evident that the Indians had nothing in terms of scholarship or textual practice to compare to the European scholars’. From the European perspective, the Indian commentaries and subcommentaries, their sophisticated technical philosophical vocabulary, their robust systems of metacritique and analysis, were worth less than the reflections of the least little Western critic. An entire epistemic tradition built up over centuries of painstaking work was dismissed with a vacuous gesture of critical self-reflexivity.²¹⁹ How could Indians lacking in historical consciousness (so ran the story) have anything to offer an age that prided itself, above all, on being historical?²²⁰ And

Das Mahābhārata, 32, where he dismisses Dahlmann’s work with the comment “a scientific monstrosity: to discuss something so undiscussable would be a waste of effort”).

216. “Monumental documents that report of the deeds of ancient kings, such as [existed] in Egypt or Babylonia, of course, did not exist in the India of the Kurus and Pāṇḍus and still did not exist there through long centuries after. And historiography in a scientific sense: how many leagues one was, of course, far from that! What purpose would it have served anyway for this epoch?” Oldenberg, *Das Mahābhārata*, 11.

217. *Ibid.*, 12.

218. *Ibid.*

219. See Arbogast Schmitt’s *Modernity and Plato: Two Paradigms of Rationality*, trans. Vishwa Adluri (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2012) for a superb discussion of how the same problem afflicts the study of ancient philosophy, and not just since the aesthetic naturalism of the nineteenth century, but already in the Renaissance.

220. The notion that the Indian mind is lacking in historical consciousness or in a sense of history—indeed, of time, of movement, of change—is a central tenet of modern scholarship. It has been used time and again to justify Western “critical” interventions in the texts of the Indians, teaching their history back to them as it were. Yet, as scholars from Biarreau to Heesterman have shown, this view rests on an insufficiently sophisticated understanding of the way tradition negotiates change. “Tradition,” writes Heesterman, “is characterized by the inner conflict of atemporal order and temporal shift rather than by resilience and adaptiveness. It is this unresolved conflict that provides the motive force

yet, when we look at the concrete details of Oldenberg's reconstruction it is evident just how much of Holtzmann's narrative he has internalized. Consider, for instance, the following longer passage in which Oldenberg traces the evolution of the epic from its heroic, knightly beginnings in the northwest to its transmutation into a work of Brahmanic lore as it moved further east and south:

If the splendor of Janamejaya's kingdom, for example, led to the first beginnings of the heroic poem concerning the deeds of his ancestors, as we may suppose following what has been said, the continued existence of the princely house will have kept such beginnings alive at first [and] will have encouraged their development. Unlike the earlier portions, however, the later, didactic portions of the epic are not as preferentially at home in the Northwest, in the land of Janamejaya. Their horizon had broadened; often, they mention places and people from the East. Herein is betrayed that the epic had detached itself from its original motherland. It was interwoven all the more firmly with the interests of a stronger, more enduring power than that of this dynasty [i.e., Janamejaya's house]. This [power] secured the great authority of the poem far beyond the region and term of the Pāṇḍu sovereignty. This power was Brahmanism. And one must add, allied with it, a second: the veneration of Kṛṣṇa.²²¹

Again like Holtzmann, Oldenberg thought the epic had undergone a change in authority from the bards to the Brahmins. He noted that the epic began with the arrival of "a *sūta* and son of a *sūta* [in the Naimiṣa Forest]," but the Brahmins progressively became "much more important in terms of their significance for the Mahābhārata."²²² Like Holtzmann Sr., he evoked the contrast between wandering minstrels and the clergy in the Middle Ages to explain the relation of the bards to the Brahmins. He wrote, "in terms of their significance for the Mahābhārata, the great administrators and enlargers of Indian literature are ahead of all these kinds of narrators [i.e., the *sūtas*]: the Brahmins. As with the rivalry between the poetry of the minstrels and the clergy in the European Middle Ages, something similar is repeated here: thereby, the Brahmins naturally do not neglect to ascribe especially salvific effects for the organizers of such recitation to the narratives which they recite and which are obviously associated with appropriate gifts for them."²²³ Oldenberg also set forth the Holtzmannian critique of Brahmanic avarice with the words, "one only needs to look at this miniature epic [i.e., the story of Śunaḥśepa in the Ṛg Veda] in order to recognize that a Brahmin is its author; it is ceremoniously recited by a

we perceive as the flexibility of tradition. Indian civilization offers a particularly clear case of this dynamic inner conflict. The conflict is not just handled surreptitiously by way of situational compromise. Once we look beyond the hard surface of the projected absolute order, it appears subtly, but no less effectively, to be expressed by the same scriptures that so impressively expound the dharma's absoluteness." J. C. Heesterman, *The Inner Conflict of Tradition: Essays in Indian Ritual, Kingship, and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 2.

221. Oldenberg, *Das Mahābhārata*, 12.

222. *Ibid.*, 14.

223. *Ibid.*, 14–15.

priest, who sits on a gold-embroidered mat, and to whom another priest, also sitting on an identical seat, responds with encouraging words. “Then for him (for the king), not the slightest sin is left. He should give a thousand (cows) to the reciter, a hundred to the respondent, besides that the two seats; and a white cart spanned with mule mares is owed to the Hotar (the reciting priest).” According to him “the Mahābhārata itself provide[d] many [such] proofs of the role that Brahmans played in such a context. It probably occasionally shines through that wicked people did not shy away from finding a trace of beggarliness in the position of such people [i.e., the Brahmans] vis-à-vis their wealthy, noble listeners and patrons.”²²⁴

Like Holtzmann, Oldenberg was convinced that if we could only “go behind this layer [i.e., “the oldest recognizable layer of the epic text”],” “the most original origin of the narrative of these knightly battles” would be found “rather among the worldly singers, for example, from the sūta-caste, than among the Brahmans.”²²⁵ Although he acknowledged that “in principle, the possibility cannot be disputed that from the beginning on, Brahmanic efforts are present,”²²⁶ it is clear that he found Holtzmann’s thesis of a Brahmanic takeover of the epic to be far more seductive. Echoing the latter’s views of Brahmanic corruption almost verbatim, he wrote,

The domination Brahmanism exerted over the epic, described here, and its connection to the great possession of this caste, the Veda: is it salutary for the life and development of this poetry? One will hardly want to answer this question positively. The innocent, joyous pleasure of narration [and] sympathy for heroic knighthood had to dissipate in the spiritual atmosphere, [it] be[came] alloyed with foreign elements. That very monstrous transformation, which took place later, of the narrative poem into a great didactic poem or even into a heap of didactic poems, manifestly has its roots here.²²⁷

Before Holtzmann, Lassen had suggested that Brahmans would have taken over a Kṣatriya epic and Goldstücker had—reviewing and paraphrasing Lassen—developed this idea into a comprehensive theory of the epic’s transformation. But the roots of Oldenberg’s criticisms of the Brahmans, as well as his evocation of the “heroic knighthood,” were specifically Holtzmannian. It was Holtzmann who first characterized the old epic in terms of the innocent, free-spirited nature of the Germanic people and it was Holtzmann who had first criticized the later epic as possessing a completely different spiritual outlook from the original. Oldenberg, as was practically obligatory for every Indologist, embellished upon this thesis, adding to it a contrast between prose and poetic sections of the epic. Opining that “we cannot doubt that the Mahābhārata, too, in an old stage of its existence had the form of prose-poetry,” he argued that “the great epic itself includes, among the colorful variety of its component parts, a great deal of prose-poetry pieces within it that look really strange in the middle

224. *Ibid.*, 15.

225. *Ibid.*, 16.

226. *Ibid.*, 17.

227. *Ibid.*, 18.

of its [otherwise] consistent poetic form.”²²⁸ This contrast built upon Holtzmann’s thesis, but permitted Oldenberg to bring in his own ideas of poetic composition into the discussion. (It also probably did not hurt that Oldenberg was recognized as the authority on Indian meter among German Indologists, so that any discussion of the epic in terms of its meters effectively brought his expertise into play.) Thus, Oldenberg now declared “one would at first have to be content with the interpretation that here—regardless of for what reason—poetic narratives have been inserted as episodes by some redactor of the epic into it.”²²⁹ And then, somewhat circularly, he concluded, “thereby we may conclude that the poetic work, of which we have the remains before us here, was nothing other than an old prose-poetry Mahābhārata. The episodes attest to the existence of the whole, to which they belong.”²³⁰

Finally, echoing Holtzmann’s concluding assessment of the epic, “not without a justified displeasure against the Brahmins, we set down the old epic. They have transformed the old heroic poem, the most beautiful spiritual treasure of their race into a boring Purana that only preaches worship of *Vishṇu*, reverence before the Brahmins, and soulless faith in works.”²³¹ Oldenberg also wrote, “we will not hide ourselves [from the fact] that the loss of the epic in its old form is manifestly one of the most grievous that the observer of the history of Indian literature has to lament. The narrative of those battles and tragic fates, closer to their origin, not, as we now have it, covered over by foreign material, will have [once] stood there simply and certainly, often awkwardly, in its massive size, which we can now only bring closer with effort and through the detours of our imagination.”²³²

This brief overview of Oldenberg’s Mahābhārata shows how, even when Indologists overtly rejected Holtzmann’s work, central principles and prejudices of his approach had, in the meanwhile, become an essential part of their collective imagination. Oldenberg was well aware of the Christian, medievalizing aspects of Holtzmann’s work. He accurately diagnosed Holtzmann’s work as having, “full of enthusiasm for the newly discovered idea of Indo-Germanic tradition, seen Germanic tribes in the Indians.” And yet, in spite of this insight, he was unable to free himself from the Freiburg scholar’s influence. He thought he had a more scientific approach to the epic and yet he was unable to see that when it came to central aspects of his work, he, no less than Holtzmann, drew on Romantic suppositions. Like Holtzmann, he too supported a racial reading of Indian history, claiming that the “oldest period” witnessed “battles in which the land was taken away from the dark-skinned foes, [and] the shattering of their strongholds. . . .”²³³ Like Holtzmann, he too belabored the comparison with the Germanic tribes, claiming that “The

228. *Ibid.*, 22.

229. *Ibid.*, 22–23.

230. *Ibid.*, 23.

231. Holtzmann Jr., *Zur Geschichte und Kritik*, 194.

232. Oldenberg, *Das Mahābhārata*, 26.

233. *Ibid.*, 7 and see also Hermann Oldenberg, “Indologie,” *Internationale Wochenschrift für Wissenschaft, Kunst und Technik* 1 (1907): 640 (“Mixing with the dark-skinned aborigines transforms the invaders, causes the Aryan to turn into the Hindu.”) and “Ueber Sanskritforschung,” *Deutsche Rundschau* 47 (1886): 395 (“We cannot express the period

memory of all this [i.e., the Āryan conquest of India] had disappeared just as the memory of Arminius [had disappeared] in Germany.”²³⁴ Like Holtzmann, he too thought that the Indians, “the greatest narrative people [Erzählervolk] in the world,” could not be without their own “heroic epic [Heldenepos].”²³⁵ Like Holtzmann, he made a distinction between the “the India of the Aryan and of the Hindu,”²³⁶ and backed up this claim with a theory of how Buddhism would have constituted the bridge between the two cultures. “Buddhism,” he writes, “has disappeared from its Indian homeland. What has triumphed is the power we call ‘Hinduism’. Its gods are the misshapen, wild, cruel, [and] lascivious Hindu gods, at their head Shiva and Vishnu. Its books are the gigantic epic, the Mahābhārata, and an unsurveyable host of literature [made up] of epic poems, legendary works, narratives, fairy tales, dramas. Everywhere we find how this people, this faith, this literature, whose familial context, pointing to the West, clearly appears in the old period, distanced itself ever further from those origins [in the West] in the course of centuries. A transformation that affects the innermost core of the people, of the soul of the people. Mixing with the dark-skinned aborigines transforms the invaders, causes the Aryan to turn into the Hindu.”²³⁷ Like Holtzmann, the story he told of the Mahābhārata was one of loss and corruption due to the infiltration of Indo-Germanic/ Āryan culture by native peoples. And while he sought explicitly to distance himself from his predecessor, he did not notice that his descriptions of the epic shared in the Romantic revivalism of the latter. “Can one not imagine such gatherings to oneself?” he wondered aloud, speaking of the Mahābhārata’s narration. “The Kṣatriyas decked in ornaments, [encrusted] with sparkling gemstones and the mass of common people, which has gathered there, their Indian bodies with their brown faces, all hanging on to the speaker’s words with passionate interest, accompanying his narration with their gestures and exclamations—and in the center, he himself, the one who

to which the origin of the ancient Vedic hymns belongs in years and not even in centuries. But we know that these hymns were present at a time when there were still no cities in India, but only villages and fortresses: at a time when the names of the mighty tribes, which, in the following period, took hold of the foremost place among the tribes of India, were not named, as little as the names of the Franks and the Bavarians [were known] in the Germany that Tacitus describes. It was the time of migrations, of the endless back-and-forth feuds...it was the time of the battle of the fair-skinned invaders, who called themselves the Aryans, against the aborigines, the ‘dark-skinned people,’ the ‘unfaithful [ones], who do not offer to the gods.’”).

234. Oldenberg, *Das Mahābhārata*, 7 and see also the preceding note for his comments in “Ueber Sanskritforschung.”

235. Oldenberg, *Das Mahābhārata*, 7. Before Oldenberg, Holtzmann had opined that “[linguistics [have] taught us that the Indo-Germanic people were already a cultural people even before their separation [into their constituent groups, the Greeks, Germans, and Indians]; the totality of their spiritual achievements and, among them, their historical recollections as well could not be left to fate in a time that did not know of the use of writing; rather, we must presume the existence of a specific class, determined on an ad hoc and only ad hoc basis, for the oldest period for each of the Indo-Germanic peoples [Holtzmann means a bardic class, charged with preserving the recollections of the people].” Holtzmann Jr., *Zur Geschichte und Kritik*, 42–43.

236. Oldenberg, *Das Mahābhārata*, 1.

237. Oldenberg, “Indologie,” 640.

recites the monotonous singsong of the śloka verses, draped with the holy thread, the legend-knowing *Brahman*.”²³⁸ The Romantic roots of German Indology would not become evident until nearly a century later, and then, too, it would be scholars in the field of German studies who first began to highlight the phenomenon.²³⁹ But here, at the transition from the first phase of German Mahābhārata reception (i.e., its reception in the work of Lassen, Goldstücker, and Holtzmann) to its second, allegedly more scientific phase of reception in the work of Oldenberg, Hopkins, and others, these origins were still unclear. They would continue to work themselves out for a generation, through Oldenberg and Hopkins all the way to late twentieth-century authors such as Fitzgerald and McGrath. They would also shape the “medievalizing” translations of van Buitenen (for whom the Kṣatriyas are “barons”) and his successors. But before we look at the work of these contemporary scholars it is helpful to return one last time to German theories of the Mahābhārata, to see how, in the meanwhile, these theories had developed beyond the work of the two Holtzmans.

A PROBLEM OF RECEPTION

In the first part of this two-part review of German Mahābhārata interpretations, we saw how, setting out from the racial theories of Lassen, German Mahābhārata scholars developed an entire branch of study dedicated to explaining how the Mahābhārata could have evolved into the text we possess today. In the meanwhile, it has become clear that this hypothesis entailed not only assumptions about the epic’s original form or its original possessors, but also about its spiritual outlook, its sociopolitical significance, and its status in the ethical transformation of the Indian people. Crucially, it also entailed an assumption of the continuing evolution of Indian thought via its successive transformations as reflected in the Mahābhārata (see chart 2.4 for a comparison of German views of the Mahābhārata). In this reading of history by proxy, while the protagonists on the two sides could change (from heroic versus priestly in the work of Holtzmann Sr., to Kṣatriyas versus Brahmins in the work of Goldstücker, and Indo-Germanic versus Brahmanic/Vaiṣṇavaite in the work of Holtzmann Jr.), the basic scheme remained the same: a conflict between the rational, secular, and progressive elements of society and its dogmatic, superstitious, and conservative or traditional elements.

In spite of the fact that this distinction and conflict was not original to the Mahābhārata, scholars adopted it as the central principle for criticism of the

238. Oldenberg, *Das Mahābhārata*, 15–16 (Oldenberg’s emphasis).

239. See for instance the recently published book by Perry Myers, *German Visions of India, 1871–1918: Commandeering the Holy Ganges during the Kaiserreich* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). Myers does not discuss Holtzmann, but see chapter 4 for a discussion of how Oldenberg’s critique of the absence of historical consciousness among the Indian people until the Buddha functions as an element of his Protestant apologetics. Unfortunately this book arrived too late for us to take it into substantial consideration for this work.

Chart of German Mahābhārata scholarship, showing how Lassen's basic distinction between the war narrative and theosophic elements of the epic were taken up and transformed by successive authors.

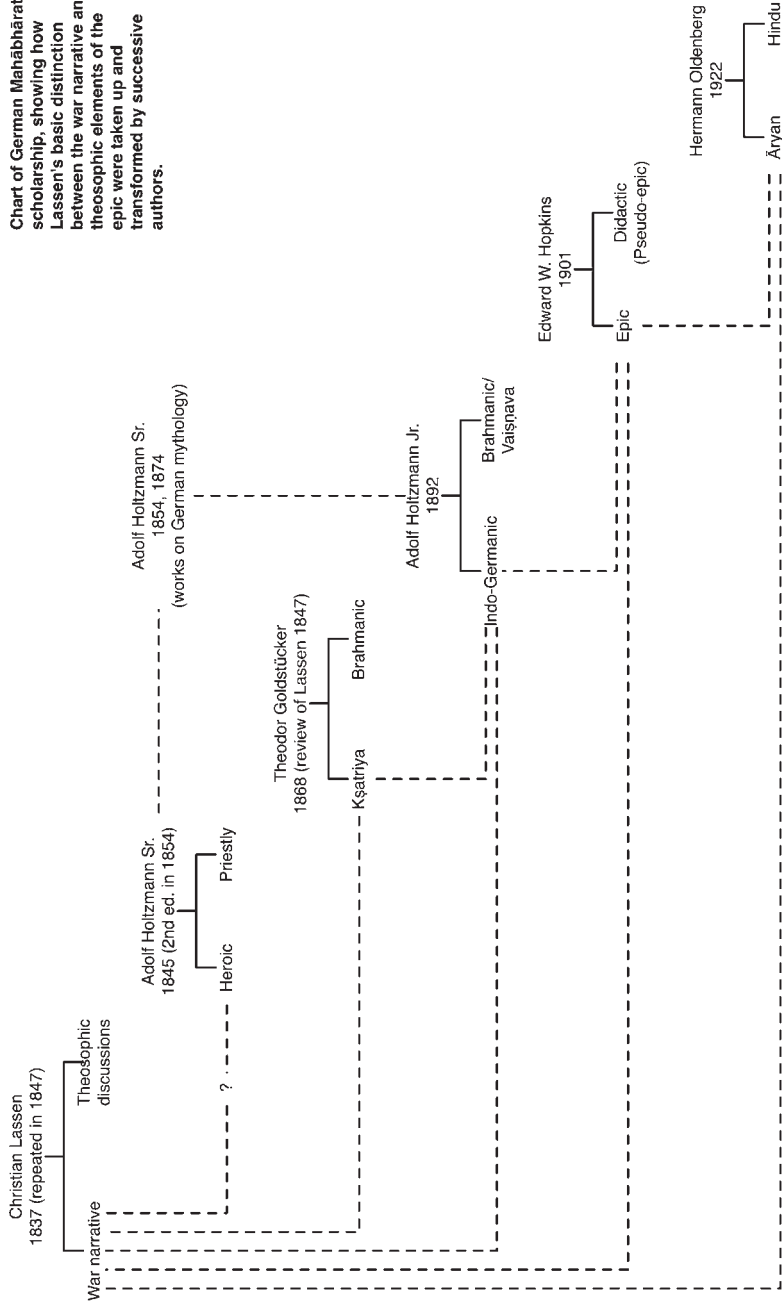


Chart 2.4 German views of the Mahābhārata compared

Mahābhārata.²⁴⁰ Via the work of figures such as Oldenberg and Hopkins (who, in 1901, putting a scientific spin on Holtzmann's theories, offered this account of the epic's genesis²⁴¹), it attained canonical status, eventually giving rise by the early twentieth century to that sham branch of science known as higher criticism of the Mahābhārata. Beyond the work of Oldenberg, twentieth-century Indologists such as Fitzgerald and McGrath would also adopt the principle.

Fitzgerald has in recent years revived a form of the Holtzmannian inversion hypothesis. Arguing that "the narrative of the received *MBh* text came into being as a radical transformation of the eschatologically framed war of the Bharata-Kurus against the Pañcalas," he claims that "the Pāṇḍavas were grafted into the Bharata lineage with great effort and ingenuity . . . They are . . . outsiders . . . [who] in terms of the great war at the center of the inherited narrative . . . reverse the polarity of the heroes and villains (from the good Bharata-Kurus vs. their enemies, the Pañcālas, to the other way around: the Pāṇḍava-Pañcāla alliance vs. the villainous Kauravas). . . ."²⁴² Further echoing Holtzmann's thesis of the Pāṇḍavas' non-Āryan origins, Fitzgerald also argues that "the 'germ' of the new *Bhārata*" (i.e., the Mahābhārata) would have been "the recasting of the old *Bhārata* with the new Pāṇḍava heroes, a 'war-party' of the gods born high up in the Himalayas, who descend into the *Bhārata* heartland, take up a place in the Bharata-Kuru dynasty, and conquer the old Bharatas through an alliance with their old rivals, the Pañcālas ("Pañcālas" in the *MBh*)."²⁴³ Like Holtzmann, he sees this new epic as "a symbolic construction addressing certain elements of its socio-political, cultural context." "The Pāṇḍavas of the *Great Bhārata* epic," according to Fitzgerald, "may well have been conceived after the historical example of some

240. Before the Mahābhārata scholars, the biblical critics Semler and Bauer had identified a distinction between the New Testament and Old Testament/Jewish aspects of the text (Semler) and between the Judaic-Petrine and Christian-Pauline factions within early Christianity (Bauer) to launch the method of a historical-critical reconstruction of the Bible. Following in their wake, the Mahābhārata critics Lassen, Goldstücker, and Holtzmann cast about in the text for a similar principle of distinction and found it in the contrast between two (alleged) redactorial agencies: the one Āryan, heroic, and Kṣatriya; the other indigenous, priestly or sophistic, and Brahmanic. Although they thought they were developing these categories independently, they were essentially replicating the biblical scholars' contrast between Christian and Jewish elements in the text.

241. Summarizing the scholarly consensus of the epic's genesis to date, Hopkins presented the following chronological summary: "Bhārata (Kuru) lays, perhaps combined into one, but with no evidence of an epic before 400 B. C. A Mahābhārata tale with Pandu heroes, lays and legends combined by the Puranic diaskeuasts, Krishna as a demigod (no evidence of didactic form or of Krishna's divine supremacy), 400–200 B. C. Remaking of the epic with Krishna as all-god, intrusion of masses of didactic matter, addition of Puranic material old and new; multiplication of exploits, 200 B.C. to 100–200 A. D. The last books added with the introduction to the first book, the swollen Anuṣāṣana separated from Čānti and recognized as a separate book, 200–400 A. D.; and finally 400 A. D. and on : occasional amplifications. . . ." Hopkins, *The Great Epic of India*, 397–98.

242. Fitzgerald, "No Contest between Memory and Invention," 110–11.

243. Ibid., 108. A few pages later, he again returns to the theme of inversion, proposing that the "the *Pāṇḍava-Bhārata*" (his term) would have been "the old *Bhārata* recast with Pāṇḍava heroes." Ibid., 112.

band of intruders who barged into the old Bharata-Kuru polity and took it over in alliance with the Pañcālas.”²⁴⁴

Another scholar to find words of praise for Holtzmann is Kevin McGrath. In his *The Sanskrit Hero: Karṇa in Epic Mahābhārata*, McGrath writes that “Holtzmann was one of the earliest western scholars to study the Mahābhārata and successfully established the epic as a field of study in the West.”²⁴⁵ He continues: “typical of his period was a search for ‘layering’ in the text, specifically for prior layers. This term refers to how the poem, hypothetically, gained in size by accretion over time; additions tended to produce different cultural levels in the poem, the ‘earlier’ parts typified as kṣatriya and the later as brahmin.” “[His] present research,” he declares, “builds upon such thinking inasmuch as it implicitly pursues that area which Holtzmann and others denote as ‘prior’: for this would signify the kṣatriya, and heroic, parts of the poem.”²⁴⁶ In a footnote on the same page, he further seeks to buttress “Holtzmann’s ‘inversion theory’” by noting that it “receives a certain validation from Patañjali, who, ‘while commenting on the Vārttika II on Pāṇini III, 2, 122 gives in his Mahābhāṣya the example *dharmeṇa ha sma kuravo yudhyante*, “the Kurus fought according to dharma”’.”²⁴⁷ (The suggestion is absurd in the extreme, because the Pāṇḍavas are descendants of Kuru—and hence “Kurus”—no less than the Kauravas. That McGrath takes the statement to refer exclusively to the Kauravas is further evidence of how scholars, determined—against all available evidence—to defend their theory of a heroic epic, resort to manipulation of texts.) McGrath’s work thus offers the clearest evidence of the continuing currency of Holtzmann’s ideas. Whether speaking of Karṇa’s “complete devotion to the honour of kṣatriya ideals”²⁴⁸ or of the “unevolved quality of Karṇa’s heroism”²⁴⁹ or of “archetypal kṣatriya behavior” (apparently, “physical trials and conflict, lineage dispute, cattle raiding, the capture of brides, weapon lore, the validity of speech, generosity upon request, and boasting”²⁵⁰), his work is testament of the long and influential *Rezeptionsgeschichte* of Holtzmann’s ideas in Mahābhārata studies.²⁵¹

244. Ibid., 112.

245. Kevin McGrath, *The Sanskrit Hero: Karṇa in Epic Mahābhārata* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2004), 11.

246. Ibid., 11–12.

247. Ibid., 11, n. 39. Although McGrath presents this morsel as a new discovery, the elder scholar was already aware of it. In fact, he cites this precise passage: noting that Pāṇini includes *dharmeṇa ha sma kuravo yudhyante* as one of his examples, he argued, “[this] appears to me to indicate that he shared the standpoint of the old poem: the Kurus fought nobly, and we may add: not, however, the Pāṇḍavas.” Holtzmann Jr., *Zur Geschichte und Kritik*, 128. McGrath might have tried actually reading Holtzmann before trying to offer “validations” of his work.

248. McGrath, *The Sanskrit Hero*, 4.

249. Ibid., 4 (emphasis in original).

250. Ibid., 5.

251. In its specific details as well, McGrath’s study closely shadows Holtzmann. In the introduction, he announces that his study is based upon “two fundamental assumptions,” one concerning “the nature of preliterate epic poetry” and the other presuming “a basic Indo-European (IE) heroic substrate.” Ibid., 1. Both theories, as we now know, can be substantially traced back to the work of the two Holtzmans. Especially in the form of a theory of an Indo-Greek-Germanic substrate, the idea of a common heroic culture linking all three traditions has direct roots in the work of the elder Holtzmann. In his descriptions

In spite of Fitzgerald's and McGrath's efforts, however, the Holtzmannian Ur-epic remained elusive. As far back as they pushed this ideal epic—and in his most recent iteration McGrath has advanced a date of the Bronze Age²⁵²—they were still unable to find evidence of it and for the simple reason that its origins lay neither in the fourth century CE nor in the fourth century BCE nor even in the twelfth century BCE, but in the nineteenth century CE when the thesis was first proposed by Lassen. The idea of an original epic, as we have seen, was a specifically German notion answering to specifically German needs. German scholars had deployed the idea in pursuit of an ideal of a heroic Āryan race. It permitted them to make polemical points against Roman Catholicism as being essentially alien to the spirit of the German people. It permitted them to identify defining traits of the “Indo-Germanic” or “Āryan” peoples—nobility, free-spiritedness, suspicion of priestly authority, a warrior culture, and so on—in contradistinction to the “Semitic” tribes. It permitted them to undertake a sustained critique of non-Germanic cultures as well as to issue stern warnings of what might befall the German nation if it permitted itself to be overrun by these cultures. Beyond these ends, the theory of a heroic epic had no relevance to Mahābhārata criticism. Yet, such was the prestige of German Mahābhārata studies that after the nineteenth century, scholars worldwide joined in the search for the original.²⁵³ Theories of an oral bardic tradition or of a heroic warrior epic became

of this presumed “Indo-European...heroic substrate” McGrath reverts (whether consciously or unconsciously) to the language of Holtzmann. In his words, what makes Karna the ideal character on whom to base so-called Indo-European (by which he basically means what Holtzmann meant by Indo-Germanic) comparisons is the fact that, “unlike other heroes in the poem, for some reason... Karna does not appear to have been overlaid with later doctrinal considerations, specifically brahminical or *vaiṣṇava*. This is the major reason he presents an interesting case for study.” Ibid., 3.

252. Kevin McGrath, *Jaya: Performance in Epic Mahābhārata* (Boston: Ilex Foundation, 2011).

253. Besides Fitzgerald and McGrath, Tsuchida has recently argued that “Lassen’s theory should be evaluated as the first important step in text-historical research on the *Mbh*. It is as a continuation of Lassen’s basic study that we are to carry on our investigations concerning the formation of the narrative structure of the epic.” Ryutaro Tsuchida, “Considerations on the Narrative Structure of the *Mahābhārata*,” *Studies in Indian Philosophy and Buddhism* 15 (2008): 15. In his conclusion he reinforces this estimation. “In conclusion to our inquiries into the narrative structure of the *Mbh*, we do not propound any new idea. Our present study has rather the character of reconfirming and developing the theory which Christian Lassen already put forward in the middle of the nineteenth century.” Ibid., 24. Indian scholars, too, joined the bandwagon. C. V. Vaidya in 1907, in a palpable echo of Lassen, describes the Mahābhārata as “something like a civil war between the pure Aryans and the mixed Aryans,” won by the latter, “with a counterpart in the Civil War in America,” while the historians S. P. Gupta and K. S. Ramachandran, confusing textual investigations with archaeological, proposed a *Jaya*, a *Bhārata*, and a *Mahābhārata* epic. Chintaman Vinayak Vaidya, *Epic India, or India as Described in the Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyaṇa* (Bombay: Mrs. Radhabai Atmaram Sagoon, 1907), 55, cited in Alf Hiltebeitel, “The Mahābhārata and the Stories Some People Tell about It—Part 1,” *Exemplar: The Journal of South Asian Studies* 1, no. 2 (2012): 11. For Gupta and Kumar’s views, see S. P. Gupta and K. S. Ramachandran, “Mahābhārata: Myth and Reality,” in *Delhi: Ancient History*, ed. Upinder Singh (New Delhi: Social Science Press, 2006), 79.

such an integral part of Mahābhārata studies that scholars who rejected them risked excommunication.²⁵⁴

Although we focused specifically on Mahābhārata studies in this chapter, the continued acceptance of these theories hints at a wider problem with the German reception of Indian texts. It is true that the German reception of the Mahābhārata had been evangelical in intent. It is true that theories of race, centering especially on the superiority of the white race, had played a major part in that reception. It is true that both these had been deployed in an attempt to re-educate Indians as to how to receive their own texts—specifically, to reject the traditional reception of the epic and to turn away from their traditional authority figures and preceptors, the Brahmins, to new ones: the Western-trained historical critics. But in a sense these problems could only arise because the German reception emerged in conditions of intellectual and cultural vacuum. As Ryan has noted, “whereas the reintroduction of Greek learning in the fifteenth century was...stimulated by the arrival of both manuscripts *and* commentators skilled in their exegesis, the nineteenth-century encounter with Indian literature was limited to the manuscripts alone, and only a small number at that. As a result, the burden of explanation and commentary fell upon a select circle of European philologists.”²⁵⁵ In spite of building up their own specializations, German scholars were never able to compensate fully for this lack. Their expertise in the technical manipulation of data could never substitute for the intimate knowledge of the text a reader trained in the commentarial tradition might have. As a result, they had to come up with their own ideas of expertise. The easiest way to do so was to propagate the thesis of a peculiar insensitivity to history on the part of Indians that made them blind to the nature of the epic as a historical tale.

This auto-didacticism continues to afflict scholarship in the present, when it is not further exacerbated by rhetorical warnings against relying on Indian commentators.²⁵⁶ Further, because German scholars were not subject to any kind of control other than having to satisfy their peers (which is not a very effective form of control if all of them share fantasies about hypermasculine Āryan warriors), they could literally

254. As noted earlier, there *were* important figures outside the German historicist paradigm. The Chicago scholar Wendy Doniger, for instance, is an important example of someone who has resisted the “Āryan influx and subsequent decline” narrative. Other scholars such as Don Handelman and David Shulman have produced useful studies on Indian texts from sociocultural and anthropological perspectives. Thomas B. Coburn has studied the Mahābhārata in conjunction with the Purāṇas (see bibliography for full citations). But all such initiatives were restricted to producing microscopic-scale analyses on sections of the epic, that is, precisely those parts the German Indologists had termed “late” and “non-original.” A comprehensive philosophical interpretation of the Mahābhārata could not get underway until the dominant narrative of the Mahābhārata’s origins as an Āryan, Kṣatriya text was challenged.

255. Christopher Ryan, *Schopenhauer’s Philosophy of Religion: The Death of God and the Oriental Renaissance* (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 6.

256. See, for instance, Hanneder, who claims that, “even when the reviewer, who is unfamiliar with this field, is not in a condition to offer a proper evaluation of the results of this work, some critical questions, which came up during reading, are added here. Although [it is] completely understandable... the systematic exclusion of the classical Indian tradition

propound any theory.²⁵⁷ Being uninformed about the epic, German audiences were not likely to ask questions of the class of professional (self-appointed) interpreters of the Mahābhārata. As curators of Indian thought to the German public, the critics had a *carte blanche*. Under such conditions, it was unavoidable that Mahābhārata criticism would attract a whole host of eccentric figures, among them individuals such as the German Johannes Becker, who thought the “Gallic druids and the Indian Brahmins were branches of a single linguistic tribe that also included Germans, Slavs, Greeks, Romans, and Persians” and that the Mahābhārata was the last surviving record of “that ‘large quantity of verses’ of which Caesar speaks when reporting about the schools of druids, those songs and ballads of which Tacitus and Jordanes knew, as well as of that ‘large quantity of verses’ which were handed down orally from singer to singer.”²⁵⁸ By the early twentieth century, the ongoing professionalization of the discipline had, to be sure, reduced the scope for such original outbursts. But what remained was not necessarily more plausible: it had merely become canonical by sheer dint of repetition. For this reason, it was important, in the first part of this work, that we disentangle these complex chains of citation and secondhand citation and trace their underlying views back to their original authors. By showing how completely dependent contemporary Mahābhārata scholarship is on the problematic and unscientific views of Lassen and Holtzmann, these two chapters illustrated the problems with basing interpretations of the Bhagavadgītā on Western scholars’ theories of the epic as a war narrative. In the next chapter, we shall resume our look at the German Gītā.

of commentary is potentially a methodological weakness. For, one can hardly encounter a biased interpretation by native commentators through excluding it; otherwise, one risks the danger of eliminating the specifically Indian ‘horizon of understanding’ along with the native reception, which [horizon] may possibly preserve something historically correct [historisch Richtiges].” Jürgen Hanneder, Review of *Rājavidyā: Das königliche Wissen um Herrschaft und Verzicht. Studien zur Bhagavadgītā* by Angelika Malinar, *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 151, no. 1 (2001): 240. But if the reviewer is “unfamiliar with this field,” how then does he know that the interpretations of native commentators are “biased”?

257. That is, at least among themselves. Outside Germany, their hegemony did not go uncontested. Madeleine Biardeau and the French scholars following in her wake largely rejected German orthodoxy regarding the Mahābhārata’s origins as a heroic Kṣatriya epic. Alf Hiltebeitel is another important representative of this tradition and has long argued that the search for a pre-Brahmanic oral archetype represents a failure to appreciate the Mahābhārata’s true origins as a Brahmanic composition. See Alf Hiltebeitel, *Rethinking the Mahābhārata: A Reader’s Guide to the Education of the Dharma King* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001) and, for a discussion of Hiltebeitel’s mature view regarding the epic, see the authors’ introductions to *Reading the Fifth Veda: Studies on the Mahabharata. Essays by Alf Hiltebeitel*, vol. 1 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2011) and *When the Goddess was a Woman: Mahabharata Ethnographies. Essays by Alf Hiltebeitel*, vol. 2 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2011), pp. xi–xxxvi and xi–xxxiii in the respective volumes.

258. Becker, *Mahabharata: Der Große Krieg*, ii.

CHAPTER 3



The Search for the Original Gītā

Every holy scripture is merely a monument of the religion, a memorial to a great spirit that was there but is there no longer. . . . It is not he who believes in holy scripture who has religion, but he who does not need one and could himself produce one.

Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Über die Religion*

INTRODUCTION

The preceding two chapters focused on a discussion of German Mahābhārata studies, especially as these played a role in the induction of historical criticism into the methodological canon of the Indologists. In this chapter, we look at how, following its canonization in the work of Lassen, Holtzmann, and others, this method was in turn transferred to the study of the Gītā and led, by the twentieth century, to a completely different picture of the text than the one held by an earlier generation of scholars.

However, besides simply tracing the continuing evolution of the German response to the Gītā, this chapter also serves broader philosophical perspectives. First, it allows us to define more precisely what we mean by German Indology. The last chapter was already a step in this direction, but in this chapter we show how the racial and historicist prejudices of an earlier generation of scholars were sanitized and institutionalized in the work of twentieth-century Indologists such as Richard Garbe, Hermann Oldenberg, and Hermann Jacobi. Thereafter, in the form of a claim about the superior critical and methodological consciousness of German scholarship, these prejudices would become a mainstay of German Indology in the work of twenty-first-century Indologists such as Heinrich von Stietencron, Angelika Malinar, and Jürgen Hanneder. Second, by exploring the methods of the Indologists, this chapter creates a textual basis for the philosophical and scientific evaluation of Indology, as discussed in the two chapters following. Until now, we have only spoken of the historical-critical method in the abstract. Even though chapter 1 presented examples of the application of this method to the Mahābhārata, it did not pursue

the question further. This chapter now turns the spotlight on method. Third and most important, this chapter introduces our critique of German claims to possessing a more “scientific” approach to Indian texts. By exposing the myth of the German approach to the Bhagavadgītā as being more scientific (a task this chapter accomplishes by showing how, in spite of their claims to controlling and standardizing the field of interpretation, German scholars left themselves open to the most arbitrary prejudices), this chapter takes a first step toward exposing Indology as a form of colonial hegemony. It rejects, with good reasons, German claims to having understood the Gītā better than Indian authors and suggests that the work of a current generation of German scholars is better understood as a continuing form of scientific apartheid.

This chapter is divided into eighteen sections. Following a preliminary section on the conditions that enabled the reemergence of the Bhagavadgītā in Germany, we then take a closer look at the Indological Gītā. Specifically we focus on six Indological Gītās: the “pantheistic Gītā” of Adolf Holtzmann Jr., the “theistic Gītā” of Richard Garbe, the “epic Gītā” of Hermann Jacobi, the “Kṛṣṇa Gītā” of Hermann Oldenberg, the “trinitarian Gītā” of Rudolf Otto, and the “Āryan Gītā” of Jakob Wilhelm Hauer. (Interwoven with these are interpretive and contextualizing sections, so that these six Gītās actually extend across fourteen sections.) To this, under the heading “The Method becomes Autonomous,” we also add a consideration of the “Brahmanic Gītā” of Georg von Simson. Simson, the latest entrant into the “original Gītā” debate, outdoes his predecessors in proposing that the Bhagavadgītā is not only an interpolation but a “secondary interpolation” (i.e., an interpolation into an interpolated passage). He ascribes this textual artifice to “the Brahmanic redactors of the *Mahābhārata*” who “felt they had to justify the actions of the Pāṇḍavas during the battle.”¹ As the final iteration in this tradition of analytic reconstructions of the Bhagavadgītā, Simson’s “Brahmanic Gītā” represents the crowning moment of German Gītā studies and provides a suitable vantage from which to look back at this history, a task we undertake in the final two sections.

THE GĪTĀ REEMERGES

Following A.W. Schlegel’s edition of 1823, nearly three-quarters of a century were to pass before another Indologist felt confident enough to tackle the translation of the Gītā again (this would be Richard Garbe, who in 1905 opened the floodgates to “the Gītā problem”). Hegel’s critique of the Gītā effectively succeeded in closing off Indian thought as a source of contemporary philosophical inspiration for much of the nineteenth century.² Further, when the Gītā finally reappeared in the late nineteenth/

1. Georg von Simson, “Die Einschaltung der *Bhagavadgītā* im *Bhīṣmaparvan* des *Mahābhārata*,” *Indo-Iranian Journal* 11, no. 3 (1969): 173.

2. Hegel’s critique is not discussed here, as it would take us far beyond the bounds of this work and, furthermore, is not germane to our concerns. See however Saverio Marchignoli, “Canonizing an Indian Text? A. W. Schlegel, W. von Humboldt, Hegel, and the *Bhagavadgītā*,”

early twentieth century as an object of specialist preoccupation, it was a radically different text. In place of the “philosophical poem” of which Humboldt had cherished such a high opinion, the *Gītā* now appeared as a confused and degenerate text, merely to be analyzed using the methods of “higher criticism.”

The first signs of a revival of interest getting underway among Indologists can be found in two reviews: the first by E. Windisch in 1870 and the second by Böhlingk in 1897.³ Significantly, both focused on the theosophic *Gītā*: Windisch’s essay was a review of the *Gītās* of J. Lorinser and R. Boxberger, and Böhlingk’s of the *Gītās* of J. Lorinser, R. Boxberger, and F. Hartmann.⁴ Windisch’s review, which effectively broke the *omertà* among the Indologists on discussing the *Bhagavadgītā*, took an extremely negative view of Lorinser’s efforts. In the first line, he cited Lorinser’s acknowledgment that he was a “‘newcomer’ ([Lorinser’s] preface, p. iii) in the field of Sanskrit” and argued that this assessment was evident from the “immense number of sins, both large and small, which he [Lorinser] had made in orthography...and in the separation of Sanskrit words...”⁵ Further, he attributed the circumstance that Lorinser’s “extremely deficient philological knowledge of the Sanskrit language” had “done relatively less damage to the material value of the book than one would expect” to the fact that he “based his work on the translations and clarifications of [the Indologists] Schlegel-Lassen, Burnouf, and Cockburn Thomson, albeit also frequently deviating from these.”⁶ (These presumably were the passages where Lorinser went wrong.) Windisch also criticized Lorinser’s theory that “every noble thought in the *Bhagavadgītā* had its source in Christianity or in the ‘primordial tradition’ [Urüberlieferung].”⁷ However, his main contention against the edition was that Lorinser did not possess an adequate knowledge of Indian thought in general to be able to arrive at a satisfactory evaluation of the *Gītā*’s doctrines. “His non-use of the Indian commentators,” Windisch wrote, “had the consequence that Dr. Lorinser was not always able to interpret Indian thoughts in the Indian spirit.” Further,

in *Sanskrit and ‘Orientalism’: Indology and Comparative Linguistics in Germany, 1750–1958*, ed. Douglas T. McGetchin, Peter K. J. Park, and Damodar SarDesai (Delhi: Manohar, 2004), 245–70 for an excellent analysis of Hegel’s concerns.

3. Ernst Windisch, Review of *Die Bhagavadgītā. Uebersetzt u. erläutert von Dr. F. Lorinser, Literarisches Zentralblatt* 43 (1870): 1165–168 and Review of *Bhagavad-Gītā oder: Das Lied der Gottheit. Aus dem Indischen übersetzt von Robert Boxberger, Literarisches Zentralblatt* 43 (1870): 1168, and Otto Böhlingk, “Bemerkungen zur Bhagavadgītā,” *Berichte über die Verhandlungen der Königlichen Sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig, Philologisch-Historische Classe* 49 (1897): 4–16. Before this, Albrecht Weber had commented that the *Bhagavadgītā* “can, in any case, only be considered a compilation of texts that are, in part, completely different from one another,” but as this was his sole comment on the text, he is not considered here. See Weber, *Indische Studien*, 394.

4. Böhlingk only mentions the former two at the margins and directs the reader’s attention to Windisch’s review in *Literarisches Zentralblatt*. He dismissed Hartmann’s efforts in a few lines and then went over to his main concern: an engagement with the *Gītā* edition of Kashinath Trimbak Telang (*The Bhagavadgītā with the Sanatsugāṭīya and the Anugītā*, vol. 8 of *The Sacred Books of the East*, ed. Max Müller [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1882]).

5. Ernst Windisch, Review of *Die Bhagavadgītā*, 1165.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid., 1166.

he argued that Lorinser “had not taken the genuine yoga literature, above all the Pātanjalasūtra with its commentaries into consideration”; whereas “it is of course necessary to [first] investigate what the relationship of the philosophemes contained in the Bhagavadgītā to this central work of yoga philosophy is.” Windisch also raised criticisms of Lorinser’s comparisons of the Gītā with the New Testament, of which he noted that the parallels raised by Lorinser could “first claim attention when it was demonstrated from a different side that the Bhagavadgītā and the Bible stood in a closer relationship.”⁸ Finally, concerning the passages that Lorinser claimed were evidence of “traces of ‘the primordial revelation’ [Uroffenbarung] or the ‘primordial tradition’ [in the Gītā],” Windisch argued that Lorinser “ought first to have investigated whether these [passages] can be found already in the Vedas.”⁹ He concluded his review by noting that “the present book clearly shows how much the text and the explanation of the Bhagavadgītā are in need of a fundamental revision by specialists. The view advanced by Dr. Lorinser needs to be subjected to a more detailed examination than is possible here.”¹⁰

Likewise, Böhlingk, too, was critical of the theosophists’ efforts. In his first line, he noted that “after Schlegel’s Latin translation of the Bhagavadgītā, which appeared in 1846,” he had “seen three German translations of the poem: Lorinser’s from 1869, Boxberger’s from 1870 and Dr. Franz Hartmann’s from 1892. None of these have contributed to the understanding of the philosophical poem in any way.”¹¹ Böhlingk was especially critical of the efforts of Hartmann. Of this edition he noted that “Hartmann’s translation reads well . . . but will satisfy a philologist as little as the previous translations [satisfied] the scholar just mentioned [i.e., Ernst Windisch].”¹² He had no patience for Hartmann’s claim that, to understand the Bhagavadgītā correctly, it was necessary for the reader to transpose himself into the same state as the author of the text: “Whoever wants to understand the true spirit that the Bhagavadgītā breathes must read the poem not in the false light of a perverse external knowledge nor even in the smoky light of theological speculation, but in the sunlight of the divine spirit; with other words: he must have that clear understanding, for whose attainment the Bhagavadgītā is itself the best guide to the path.”¹³ Böhlingk was cutting in his response to this idea of divine inspiration as a prerequisite for correct understanding. In his words, since “this sunlight of the divine spirit did not illumine [him] while reading the poem, I have to declare that I am not in agreement with Hartmann’s interpretation.”¹⁴

This negative assessment of the theosophic Gītā by two of the best established names in Indology in Germany almost certainly played a role in accelerating the

8. Ibid., 1167.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid., 1167–168.

11. Böhlingk, “Bemerkungen,” 1. Böhlingk mentions an edition of 1892 for Hartmann, but the earliest year of publication for his translation is 1899. It is possible he was referring to the translation of excerpts Hartmann published in the journal *Lotusblüthen* (*Lotus Blossoms*), which he published between 1892 and 1900.

12. Böhlingk, “Bemerkungen,” 1.

13. Ibid., 1.

14. Ibid., 1–2.

rediscovery of the text by Indologists. Both Windisch and Böhlingk had pointed to the need for the *Gītā* to be taken up once more by the specialists; both were equally adamant that linguistic and philological competence were the key to the proper interpretation and evaluation of the text. Windisch had criticized Lorinser for his lack of expertise in Sanskrit as well as for his insufficient knowledge of Indian texts in general. Böhlingk too, in the main part of his article, focused on specialized questions of variant readings, style, and meter. He mocked Hartmann's (theosophy inspired) idea that the reading of the text ought to serve some higher purpose than a display of one's philological erudition. Further, following his devastating review of Hartmann's *Gītā* (a review he concluded by noting that "he did not intend to polemicize, but permitted [himself] to reprint his [i.e., Hartmann's] commentary on [verse] 1,6" which he then did with obvious satisfaction¹⁵), he turned back to the Schlegel edition of 1823, leaving the reader in no doubt as to whom he considered the true experts on the *Gītā*. There is clearly a concerted effort in these early works to reclaim the *Gītā* for the Indologists from the theosophists.

But even prior to Windisch and Böhlingk, the stage for a revival of interest in the *Gītā* had already been set by the philological and historical researches of Lassen and Holtzmann. As we saw in the first chapter, the two authors had taken a historicizing approach to the *Mahābhārata*. Specifically, they set aside the text's meaning for a consideration of its origins, especially as these origins could be used to confirm a European narrative of racial decline. Lassen and Holtzmann treated the *Mahābhārata* as a purely historical work. To them, it seemed inconceivable that the text could be regarded as a source of normative values or insights. (In fact, they were quite dismissive of these aspects of the text, which they uniformly attributed to Brahmanic malfeasance). Instead, they were only interested in the text as a work that could illumine specific events in Indian antiquity: the incursion of the Āryans, the struggle for racial supremacy, the defeat of the inferior peoples, and the infiltration of pure Āryan customs by the ritualistic worship of the Brahmins. In spite of slight differences in nuance (Lassen, for example, in contrast to Holtzmann, considered the Brahmins also to be of Āryan origin), the broad outlines of the story they told were remarkably similar. By shifting attention from the doctrines or contents of the texts themselves to the information that had been laid down unawares in them, the two authors set the stage for a renewed engagement with the *Gītā*. Indian texts could now be read: (1) as non-self-conscious works (i.e., as containing implicit data that outweighed in significance their explicit doctrines, rendering the latter superfluous) and (2) as noncontemporaneous works (i.e., as already absorbed within and superseded by European self-reflexivity). Both these conditions would be crucial in enabling a new form of engagement with Indian texts in the wake of Hegel's criticism.

The immediate event for the reemergence of the *Gītā*, however, was Holtzmann's reconstruction of the original *Gītā*. In 1893, as part of his book-by-book analysis of the *Mahābhārata*, Holtzmann had published a critique of the *Gītā*.¹⁶ In this work, he

15. *Ibid.*, 2.

16. Holtzmann Jr., *Die neunzehn Bücher des Mahābhārata*, 121–67.

asserted that the Bhagavadgītā had originally been a pantheistic poem reflective of Indo-German warrior beliefs about courage, the necessity of battle, and the senselessness of the fear of death. Holtzmann therefore argued that one had to distinguish between two Bhagavadgītās, “an older and a younger one.”¹⁷ The remainder of his article was concerned with proposing a reconstruction of this younger Gītā. Although from a scientific perspective completely jejune, Holtzmann’s efforts at reconstruction of an original poem made it possible for scholars to now engage with the Gītā without running up against Hegel’s criticisms. In particular, by transferring historicist prejudices gleaned from nineteenth-century intellectual life (Comte was a particular source of inspiration as we show in the fifth chapter) to Indian texts, Holtzmann and others created the conditions for a mechanical and unthinking approach to Indian texts. Thus, in the wake of the pseudohistorical researches of Lassen and Holtzmann, German translators and commentators of the poem began to focus exclusively on a narrow set of questions: what was the original Gītā? Which layers were original to the poem? Was the text’s basic outlook pantheistic or theistic? Which doctrines had been added to the poem and when and by whom? Unable to see that the roots of these problems lay not in the text itself, but in the peculiar history of the German reception of the Gītā, these scholars began to identify the task of critical scholarship with the resolution of these (pseudo)problems. Further, ignoring the Gītā’s philosophical complexity, they began to propose a number of pseudocritical reconstructions, reconstructions that supposedly provided a resolution to the Gītā problem by disentangling the complex history of the text. Inevitably, these reconstructions focused on identifying an original or core Gītā, to which then later elements were supposed to have been added. (At times, these reconstructions could take fantastic forms, as was the case with Holtzmann who declared that Droṇa not Kṛṣṇa was the original speaker of the Bhagavadgītā.)

In spite of the many problems with Holtzmann’s approach, by the early twentieth century the Bhagavadgītā was once again firmly established as a key Indian text within the German canon. Holtzmann’s reconstruction of the original Bhagavadgītā directly triggered Garbe’s edition of 1905 and this edition was, in turn, followed by four others: Hermann Jacobi in 1918,¹⁸ Hermann Oldenberg in 1919,¹⁹ Rudolf Otto in 1934,²⁰ and Jakob Wilhelm Hauer in 1937.²¹ (Otto in fact produced three works between 1934 and 1935, all claiming to have found the original Gītā.²²) All these

17. Ibid., 163.

18. Hermann Jacobi, “Über die Einfügung der Bhagavadgītā im Mahābhārata,” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 72 (1918): 323–27.

19. Hermann Oldenberg, “Bemerkungen zur Bhagavadgītā,” *NG, Philologisch-historische Klasse* (1919): 321–38; reprinted in Hermann Oldenberg, *Kleine Schriften*, vol. 2, ed. Klaus L. Janert (Wiesbaden: Fritz Steiner Verlag, 1967), 1459–76. All citations refer to the 1919 text.

20. Rudolf Otto, *Die Urgestalt der Bhagavadgītā* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1934).

21. Jakob Wilhelm Hauer, *Eine indo-arische Metaphysik des Kampfes und der Tat: Die Bhagavadgītā in neuer Sicht mit Übersetzungen* (Stuttgart: Kolhammer, 1937).

22. A year after his *Die Urgestalt der Bhagavadgītā*, a work purporting to show that the “Ur-Gītā” comprised only sections of chapter 2, chapter 10, and the great theophany of

works were, in some way, a response to Holtzmann. Others to pass judgment on the so-called Gītā problem included E. W. Hopkins (1905) and Moriz Winternitz (1907 and 1909).²³ Further, in the wake of the German controversy over the original Gītā, a number of other scholars entered the debate with their own hypotheses (e.g., the Indian scholar G. S. Khair, who in 1969 published a book purporting to show that the Gītā had been composed not by one author, but by three authors; according to Khair, this circumstance accounted for the plurality of views and the inconsistencies in the poem).²⁴ In the same year, the German scholar Georg von Simson also published a widely noticed article in which he advanced an even more audacious claim: not only was the Bhagavadgītā not original to the Mahābhārata, but also at least two other books containing the Gītā ought to be excised from the text. Simson's article represented the culmination of nearly three-quarters of a century of effort by German scholars to undermine the normative form and extent of the Bhagavadgītā. But it would not be the last: beyond his work, others such as Angelika Malinar (in 1996 and 2007) and Jürgen Hanneder (with a review of Angelika Malinar's 1996 commentary and of Michael Brück's 2008 edition) would enter the debate.²⁵ Drawing on the racial and historicist prejudices of Lassen and Holtzmann (as well as invoking the alleged superiority of European critical consciousness), these scholars would argue either against the Indian commentarial tradition (Malinar) or against the Gītā's normative validity (Hanneder) or even against modern Hindu appropriations of the text (Malinar and Hanneder; the latter also asserts that the Bhagavadgītā first attained its canonical status in India due to the efforts of German Indologists).²⁶

chapter 11, Otto also produced *Lehrtraktate der Bhagavad-Gītā* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1935). In this new book, he expanded on this theory of an Ur-Gītā, showing how the poem was expanded by the addition of eight "Lehrtraktaten" (doctrinal treatises) to a "Traktatenkranz" (a wreath of treatises). *Lehrtraktate* was followed by a translation, *Der Sang des Hehr-Erhabenen. Die Bhagavad-Gītā übertragen und erläutert* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1935), essentially a facsimile of Garbe's edition.

23. E. W. Hopkins, Review of *Die Bhagavadgītā, aus dem Sanskrit übersetzt, mit einer Einleitung über ihre ursprüngliche Gestalt, ihre Lehren und ihr Alter* by Richard Garbe, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (1905): 384–89; Moriz Winternitz, Review of *Vier philosophische Texte aus dem Mahābhārata*, 194–202 (Garbe's theory is discussed on pp. 196–97) and Moriz Winternitz, *Geschichte der indischen Literatur*, vol. 1: *Einleitung—Der Veda—Die volkstümlichen Epen und die Purāṇen* (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1909), 373–91.

24. Gajanan Shripat Khair, *Quest for the Original Gita* (Mumbai and Delhi: Somaiya Publications, 1969). Khair writes that "when a critical study of the text was attempted [by the Western Orientalists], difficulties arose about the diversity of doctrines and their coherent interpretation. Then arose the theory of interpolations, first advanced by Humboldt in 1826, and pursued thereafter by many other critics" and he then quotes the views of von Humboldt, A. Weber, Adolph Holtzmann, E. W. Hopkins, Richard Garbe, Rudolph Otto and M. Winternitz as evidence of the consensus that the Bhagavadgītā is a composite work. See *ibid.*, 12 and *ibid.*, 12–14.

25. See Jürgen Hanneder, Review of *Bhagavad Gita. Der Gesang des Erhabenen*, edited and translated by Michael von Brück, *Marburger Forum*, 9.4 (2008); http://www.philosophia-online.de/mafo/heft2008-4/Han_Bhag.htm. The review of Malinar is the one cited earlier.

26. "What will perhaps not be so clear to the reader is that the Bhagavadgītā originally attains its present stature at the [same] moment in time as it is received in the West. The

THE PANTHEISTIC GĪTĀ OF ADOLF HOLTZMANN

In 1892 Adolf Holtzmann Jr. built on his ideas of an original epic by publishing what was to be the most comprehensive review of German Gītā scholarship to date. Among German editions or reviews, Holtzmann listed Othmar Frank's 1821 edition, Schlegel's 1823 Latin edition and his 1826 response to Langlois (originally published in the *Journal Asiatique*, the original venue of Langlois' criticisms and reprinted as an independent work in 1846), and Humboldt's 1827 defense of Schlegel's edition. Holtzmann also mentioned Lassen's 1846 edition (a revised edition of Schlegel 1823).²⁷ Among German translations, he listed F. Majer's 1802 translation (of Wilkins' edition), F. Schlegel's 1808 translation of excerpts from the Bhagavadgītā, C. R. S. Peiper's 1834 translation, F. Lorinser's 1869 translation and both R. Boxberger's 1863 and 1870 translations.²⁸ Finally, as regards commentaries or interpretations, he listed the introduction and notes to the text in Schlegel 1823 (expanded in Lassen 1846), Humboldt's two essays on the Gītā (1826 and 1827), Hegel's 1827 review, F. Lorinser's 1869 introduction and appendix to his edition, and C. Felsch's 1888²⁹ article.³⁰

Holtzmann was thus well informed about the history of the German reception of the Gītā. He had consulted almost all the major editions available and was aware of the main debates concerning the reception, translation, and interpretation of the poem. However, his own work was to take the German reception of the Gītā in a strikingly new direction: a reconstruction of the so-called older Gītā. As this idea was to have a long and powerful *Wirkungsgeschichte* in German Indology (there is not a single German Gītā commentary in the period that does not in some way weigh in on the question of the Gītā's oldest layers), it is worth looking at how Holtzmann arrived at the idea. Prior to Holtzmann, scholars had noticed changes of inflection in the poem and some had gone as far as to suggest heterogenous composition (e.g., Lorinser, who attributed the noblest passages of the poem to Christian influences, specifically, the New Testament). However, Holtzmann was probably the first to actually attempt a reconstruction of the supposed original. In part, he was supported here by his ideas about an original Indo-Germanic heroic epic, which we have seen in the second chapter. As with the epic, Holtzmann wished to distinguish original heroic elements from later Brahmanic or theistic additions. But Holtzmann also drew upon a second source for his thesis of the Gītā's revision: this was the work

German reader should therefore not see himself as an ethnologist, who, in amazement, encounters another country and its religion for the first time, rather, he holds here in his hands the result of long discussions and interactions between his own [culture] and Indian culture." Hanneder, Review of *Bhagavad Gita. Der Gesang des Erhabenen*, edited and translated by Michael von Brück.

27. Holtzmann Jr., *Die neunzehn Bücher*, 129.

28. *Ibid.*, 133.

29. C. Felsch, "In welchem Verhältnisse steht die Moral der *Bhag.* zur Moral der Inder um die Zeit der Entstehung dieses Gedichtes?," *Zeitschrift für exakte Philosophie* XVI (1888): 369–412.

30. Holtzmann Jr., *Die neunzehn Bücher*, 150–53.

of von Humboldt, who in his 1826–27 essay had already pointed to the variation in the Bhagavadgītā's style and argumentation. For Humboldt, this variation was not necessarily a sign of revision. As he noted, "it is a wise man here who speaks out of the fullness and enthusiasm of his knowledge and his feeling, not a philosopher trained in a school who distributes his material according to a specific method and arrives at the final conclusions of his teaching along the thread of an artificial chain of ideas." "Rather, this [teaching] unfolds like an organism of nature itself."³¹ Humboldt emphasized that in spite of the Bhagavadgītā's seemingly disorganized presentation, the poem had a clear structure that revealed itself upon a careful exploration of the text.³² He further suggested that there were good reasons for its recursive (and, perhaps to Western ears, repetitive) style, which was necessitated above all by its pedagogic aim and context.³³

Holtzmann, however, setting out from his a priori ideas of the Mahābhārata's history, was adamant about the possibility of identifying similar changes to the Bhagavadgītā. Invoking Humboldt's views of the poem in support, he argued that the Bhagavadgītā was a composite work made up of different historical layers. Thus, he cited Humboldt's comment (made toward the end of his 1827 essay) that "the last chapter begins with the question of the advantages of the disdain for action and the rejection of its fruits as though it were a completely new question, [even though] it was already discussed in the first [few] chapters."³⁴ Holtzmann also wrote, apparently quoting Humboldt, that "the first eleven chapters enclose the doctrine completely"; others could follow on the eighteenth chapter, but if the poem were to conclude with the eleventh, it would hardly 'appear deficient'.³⁵ (In actuality, what Humboldt had written was: "the first eleven chapter enclose the doctrine completely... if the conclusion appended to the end of the eighteenth chapter (from *śloka* 63 onwards)

31. Humboldt, "Über die unter dem Namen Bhagavad-Gītā bekannte Episode des Mahā-Bhārata II," 325.

32. "In every chapter, in fact in most of them a number of times, the respective individual sentence is immediately linked to the concluding sentence, and one can overview the whole in a simple and brief glance. Unconcerned with whether what is said was already fully clear from the preceding [section], the poet expresses his meaning fully in each major passage, and [yet] in each such passage a clear idea is combined with an enigmatic one. The poet then returns sooner or later to the latter. Thus, the whole is not composed bit by bit from parts, but can be compared to a painting that one sees at once, albeit veiled in mist and where a gradually increasing illumination chases away the mist until finally every form shines forth in definite clarity." Ibid., 325–26.

33. "Hereby repetitions are unavoidable; indeed, material that has been touched upon many times is either carefully developed in each passage or displayed from a new side or in a new connection. This repetition with the intent of inculcating [the doctrine in the listener] cannot surprise us in a poem which throughout is exhortatory and urges toward composure, firm belief and action. Nonetheless, in spite of all the looseness of the context, everything proceeds toward the final goal on a natural path—one that is not intentionally thought through, but determined by the emotional state of the teacher and the impression brought about in the student." Ibid., 326.

34. Humboldt, "Über die unter dem Namen Bhagavad-Gītā bekannte Episode des Mahā-Bhārata II," 326.

35. Holtzmann Jr., *Die neunzehn Bücher*, 151.

were to follow after the final verse of the eleventh chapter, I believe that the poem would hardly appear deficient.”³⁶) Holtzmann also cited two other comments of Humboldt’s: “the second [chapter], perhaps the most beautiful and sublime of them all, already presents the basic principles of the entire system” and “one can with great probability assume the existence of insertions and additions. . . .” (although he then left out the caveat that “one is not in a position to identify them individually”).³⁷

Holtzmann interpreted these comments as evidence that Humboldt in 1827 had already come close to the view he, Holtzmann, held. According to him, Humboldt had “recogniz[ed] that the work had undergone a revision,”³⁸ but he greatly expanded the scope of these revisionistic tendencies in the poem. He drew attention to the fact that in the preamble to the Gītā in the Bhīṣmaparvan, “a dialogue between *Duryodhana* and *Droṇa* is announced and begun, only to be then interrupted almost as soon as it is begun and replaced by a dialogue between *Kṛṣṇa* and *Arjuna*.”³⁹ “Such hints,” he argued, “must always be taken seriously.” “It appears to me not inconceivable that in the old non-Vishnuistic *Bhagavadgītā* the learned Brahman *Droṇa* was the speaker [of the *Bhagavadgītā*] and that he then, in the Vishnuistic revision [of the poem], had to make place for *Kṛṣṇa*.”⁴⁰ Further, he argued that the philosophical dialogue that follows had “something disconcerting [about it] for our tastes.” Even though “the old epic poet has the right to deal as he likes with place and time,” argued Holtzmann, “if an original reflection (one much shorter than the one now present) about the senselessness of fearing death were to have its place anywhere, it would be here.” In support for his thesis of an original shorter Gītā centering on ideas of the nullity of the fear of death, he offered a comparative perspective. He argued that the reason “the ancient Indians feared death as little as the ancient Germans” was because they shared a common belief that “death on the battlefield opened the gates of heaven to them [i.e., to the fallen warrior].” According to him, “the poet of the old *Bhagavadgītā*,” whom he “consider[ed] to be identical with the poet of the older *Mahābhārata*,” “found this belief already in place [among the Indo-Germanic warriors] and gave expression to it.” But, he argued, Kṛṣṇa also “placed another element [drawn] from the outlook of his age alongside it: pantheism [or] the idea of the eternally existent world soul, which only changes its [external] manifestations, which are a matter of indifference.” In his opinion, these two principles (fearlessness of death and pantheism) were responsible for the basic texture of the ancient epic *Bhagavadgītā*. In the course of its history, however, a third element was added to the poem: the philosophy of *yoga*. Writes Holtzmann: “thus in the second chapter . . . in which with verse 6.26.11 . . . the actual didactic poem begins, *Kṛṣṇa*’s answer addresses both these points, but it also places

36. Humboldt, “Über die unter dem Namen *Bhagavad-Gītā* bekannte Episode des *Mahā-Bhārata* II,” 327.

37. Holtzmann, *Die neunzehn Bücher*, 151; Holtzmann cites pp. 47 and 53 as the source, but this is incorrect: in the original edition they are 48 and 54 and in the 1906 reprint pp. 328 and 334 (the caveat is also on 334).

38. Holtzmann Jr., *Die neunzehn Bücher*, 151.

39. Ibid., 153.

40. Ibid., 153–54.

a *third* way of looking at things, one from the perspective of immersion [Vertiefung] (*yoga*), alongside.”⁴¹ The contrast between these three principles was explicated by Holtzmann as follows:

You are a warrior; for a warrior there is nothing better than a just battle, which opens the gates of heaven for him; either triumph and rule the earth or fall [in battle] and attain eternal glory; cowardice and dishonor, however, are worse than death—with these words *Kṛṣṇa* makes use of the first perspective, that of the old heroic age. For this heroic outlook, battle for heroes is an end in itself and not a means: ‘fight for the sake of fighting’. That glory is much higher than life is also the opinion of *Karṇa*, the representative of the old heroic age.⁴²

Likewise of the pantheistic outlook he wrote:

Kṛṣṇa illumines Arjuna’s reluctance to murder [his relatives] just as emphatically from the second, pantheistic perspective (specifically, right at the beginning of his speech in the current form of the poem): you lament for those who are not to be lamented; the wise person laments neither the living nor the dead. Never did either you or I exist nor will [there be a time] when either of us will not exist. As we pass from youth to old age, so also do we pass from one existence to the other.⁴³

Holtzmann continued in this fashion until verse 2.30. To him, it was clear that these verses were evidence of a pantheistic outlook in the *Gītā*, either introduced into the poem at the same time as the heroic outlook or at a later stage, but in any case comprising an independent layer. Finally, he wrote of the third, meditative or philosophic outlook:

Thereafter *Kṛṣṇa* discusses his topic, the folly of fearing death, from a third angle, from the perspective of the doctrine of immersion. However, we already see here that the *Bhagavadgītā* is not a work of systematic philosophy. [For,] in this third section, *Kṛṣṇa* contradicts what he had said in the first two; there [he said]: “rule the earth”, here [he says]: “give up every wish”; there [he said]: “your reward will be heaven”; here [he says]: “you should not strive for heaven and its rewards”.⁴⁴

Holtzmann also cited Humboldt’s view of the second chapter as “the most beautiful” but with the additional observation: “he could perhaps also have added: the oldest.” According to Holtzmann, the second chapter of the *Bhagavadgītā* “presented the main thoughts of the whole poem; the following chapters only discuss individual aspects in more detail and clear away seeming contradictions or possible objections.”⁴⁵ Thus, he pointed to the fact that in the third chapter Arjuna raises the

41. *Ibid.*, 154.

42. *Ibid.*, 154–55.

43. *Ibid.*, 155.

44. *Ibid.*, 155.

45. *Ibid.*, 156.

question of the seeming contradiction between the imperative to perform one's duty and the imperative to abstain from action. Chapter 3, however, was still considered by him to have been part of the original Gītā.

On the other hand, Holtzmann took a negative view of chapter 4. Noting that the fourth chapter "marks a new beginning," he argued that "perhaps the additions already begin from here,"⁴⁶ a view he justified with the following consideration:

When *Kṛṣṇa* now declares that what he is presenting is ancient wisdom, albeit wisdom that has been forgotten in the course of time, and that he is now revealing this wisdom anew to *Arjuna*, this sounds suspicious; a teaching that is introduced in this manner is still unknown and new.⁴⁷

Holtzmann also argued that the fourth chapter was distinguished from the preceding chapters "in a remarkable way" in that "*Kṛṣṇa* from now on identifies himself with the world soul, the Self, and calls himself the unborn Lord of all beings."⁴⁸ Although he does not explicitly develop his criticism here, it is clear that this identification of *Kṛṣṇa* with the world soul would, from his perspective, have amounted to a Brahmanic imposition of (theistic) ideas of divinity upon a (pantheistic) Indo-Germanic outlook. On balance, however, he had mixed feelings about chapter 4, since the chapter also refers to a lineage of kings (the Ikṣvāku dynasty) as the first recipients of this wisdom, a fact he immediately seized upon as support for his thesis of an original warrior Gītā. In his words,

It is noteworthy that here not priests but kings are mentioned as the old guardians of the *Bhagavadgītā* [actually *Kṛṣṇa* says nothing of the sort] and, as *Madhusūdana* [i.e., *Kṛṣṇa*] notes, the sun god is the origin of the warrior caste. The old poem was part of royal and courtly poetry; the new 'revelation' in contrast describes a revision and a continuation along lines favored by the worshippers of *Vishṇu*.⁴⁹

Holtzmann continues with a summary of chapters 5 to 11, but as these do not play any role in his reconstruction of the pantheistic original, we omit a discussion here. Of chapter 12 he noted that it "discusses the question of which path leads more directly to the goal of final liberation, immersion in the (impersonal) all being or devotion to the (personal) *Kṛṣṇa*" and then he argued, "thus here a decision should be made between the older pantheism and the younger service of *Vishṇu*."⁵⁰ Noting that *Kṛṣṇa*'s answer is that both paths lead to the goal, but the latter is more secure, Holtzmann argued that "this is the point that raised the *Bhagavadgītā* to [the status of] the central book of the newer Vedantism; the concept of *bhakti*, the main principle of the *Bhāgavata* and other Vishnuistic sects." In contrast, he argued that the

46. Ibid., 157.

47. Ibid.

48. Ibid.

49. Ibid.

50. Ibid., 159.

thirteenth chapter was “completely pantheistic and did not mention *Kṛshṇa*.”⁵¹ He summarized but did not comment on chapters 14–18.

Based on this examination of the *Bhagavadgītā*’s chapters and contents, Holtzmann concluded that “we do not have a systematic philosophical work before us here. The second chapter already contains the complete material of the poem; the doctrines presented there are then repeated, added to, and illumined from new perspectives.” “Our work,” he further wrote, “demonstrates a closed philosophical system as little as the older *Upanishad*; in particular [it does not have] a fixed philosophical terminology. . . . We have poetry before us, not a philosophical treatise.”⁵² Following this analysis of the poem’s character, Holtzmann then returned to his thesis of the *Bhagavadgītā*’s genesis. In his words,

It is not believable that one and the same poet could have such a different stance toward the doctrine of the three *guṇas*, which he [i.e., the poet of the *Gītā*] rejects in the second and fourteenth chapters, whereas he makes them the key and basis for his entire presentation in the last two chapters. Even more conspicuous is the fact that the theological idea of the poem contradicts itself: on the one hand, [we have] the pantheistic and utterly impersonal world soul; on the other, the utterly personal and realistic *Kṛshṇa-Vishṇu*, [who is] incarnate as a man—and we are supposed to believe that both these are the same thing.⁵³

Holtzmann’s solution to the (presumed) contradiction was characteristic of his approach:

We can [he wrote] only help ourselves out [of this predicament] with the supposition that we have a Vishnuistic revision of a pantheistic poem before us. We must distinguish between an older and a younger *Bhagavadgītā*—the older was a pantheistic philosophical-poetic episode of the old, genuine *Mahābhārata*. The [latter’s] theme was the worthlessness of the fear of death from the perspective of a pantheistic worldview, a worldview that had been the common possession of the cultured at the time.⁵⁴

To which he added parenthetically, “we mean the time in which the older *Upanishad* and the emergence and growth of the older Buddhism belong.”⁵⁵

Unsurprisingly, the story Holtzmann recounted about the evolution and growth of the *Bhagavadgītā* was essentially identical to the one he told about the *Mahābhārata*. Indeed, the basic idea underlying the former could be found in (and was taken from) the latter:

The old heroic legend knew of a different motive for scorning death: the certitude of immortality in *Indra*’s heaven. Our poet [Holtzmann means the poet of the *Gītā*]

51. *Ibid.*, 160.

52. *Ibid.*, 163.

53. *Ibid.*

54. *Ibid.*, 163–64.

55. *Ibid.*, 164.

retained this motif, but, as a true poet, he also placed another motif alongside it, one more common for his time and its worldview: pantheism; just as the poet of the *Nibelungenlied* in order to explain Kriemhild's actions replaces the motif of blood vengeance, which was no longer common, with that of fidelity to her spouse.⁵⁶

Even so, it is not easy to determine precisely what Holtzmann means. At times, he seems to have in mind a poetic composition that embroidered upon a prevalent ideology (and thus presented fictional characters in a fictional setting espousing historically accurate views). At other times, he seems to think there was an actual epic conflict (whether between Indo-Germans and Indo-Germans or possibly between Lassen's white Āryans and black Dravidians is irrelevant for our purposes here) and that the poet took up this historical incident in order to advance certain philosophical views (thus presenting real characters in a real setting espousing the poet's personal views). For instance, in the very next line after the passage quoted here he presents a completely different (and contradictory) view of the *Bhagavadgītā*'s origins:

Precisely in this place was the best opportunity for a brief conversation about death and its insignificance and the poet used this opportunity in order to give his pantheistic worldview the noblest expression. The speaker, however, was not *Kṛṣṇa* but a hero of the *Kauravas*, perhaps *Droṇa*.⁵⁷

Apparently unaware of the contradiction between these two views, Holtzmann continued with his reconstruction. According to him, "the manifest opposition to sacrifice and penitence and to the superstitious reverence of the *Veda*, which are rather a hindrance to the attainment of peace of mind, are rooted in this old pantheistic poem, from which the second chapter in particular, with its simple style, [and] powerful and clear language, has probably been taken word for word."⁵⁸ In contrast, he argued of the later poem (the second or third depending on how we read him) that

the younger *Bhagavadgītā* makes *Kṛṣṇa* the speaker and identifies him straightaway with the world soul. This revision emerges in a period when the Brahmins found it opportune to reconcile their polytheism with the folk religion in order to be able to take up the battle against Buddhism. In the *Bhagavadgītā* that is now present to us, we likely see the sole large piece of the [original] *Mahābhārata* which has remained unchanged since the Brahmanic revision, perhaps three or four centuries AD. To be sure, *Vishṇu* has already been identified with *Kṛṣṇa* and thus with the world soul, but he is still in the background and the arrogance of the Brahmins is still far from manifesting as sublimely as it does in the present form of the *Mahābhārata*; there is more talk of the duties of the priests than of their rights. [And] the language is clear and perspicuous, pure and old-fashioned [alterthümlich].⁵⁹

56. Ibid.

57. Ibid.

58. Ibid.

59. Ibid., 164–65.

Indeed, Holtzmann cited the *Bhagavadgītā* (at least the parts of it he considered “old”) as the paradigm of what a prerevision, historic heroic epic might have looked like:

It appears to me that the *Bhagavadgītā* shows us what the *Mahābhārata* after the first Brahmanic revision would have looked like in terms of its content and language, and it is possible that the powerful verses of the second chapter are preserved to us [precisely] as the first poet of the *Mahābhārata* composed them.⁶⁰

Holtzmann’s reconstruction of the *Bhagavadgītā* ends here, but his ideas of an original *Gītā*, of a Brahmanic revision of the poem, and of the possibility of being able to separate out the “heroic” and/or “epic” portions of the poem from its “pantheistic,” “theistic,” “Brahmanic,” “Kṛṣṇaite” and “ritualistic” portions was to be hugely influential upon a generation of scholars. Hopkins adopted Holtzmann’s views as his own, even presenting what was, in fact, a highly tenuous suggestion as settled fact in his 1895 text, *The Religions of India*. “This Divine Song (or Song of the Blessed One) is at present a Krishnaite version of an older Vishnuite poem, and this in turn was at first an unsectarian work, perhaps a late Upanishad. . . . The impersonal ‘That,’ i.e., absolute being, *brahma*, changes almost at once to the personal He (*ātmā* as Lord). As shows the whole Song, *brahma* throughout is understood to be personal.”⁶¹ Within twelve years of Holtzmann’s work, Richard Garbe also responded with his own reconstruction and thereafter the debate raged for nearly a quarter of a century among German Indologists. Garbe and Jacobi, for instance, would duel it out between 1921 and 1922 in the pages of the *Deutsche Literaturzeitung* and in 1919 Hermann Oldenberg, the self-appointed arbiter of Indology, would enter the debate as well. Beyond the early twentieth century and in large part through its canonization in the work of the German scholars, Holtzmann’s thesis of a pantheistic *Gītā* that had undergone a theistic revision at the hands of Brahmans was to leave a complex legacy to *Bhagavadgītā* studies in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. Only rarely would scholars completely turn away from the premises and problems of the German approach, as, for example, the French Sanskritist Émile Senart did, when in the introduction to his translation of the *Gītā* he noted, “Efforts have been made to distinguish pieces of different origin; attempts that are ephemeral as well as arbitrary.”⁶² For the most part, however, scholars took the Holtzmannian legacy of German *Gītā* studies seriously, as Malinar, for instance, does when she writes of Holtzmann’s Brahmanic revision hypothesis that, “although it has been questioned and debated, this reconstruction remained influential in subsequent discussion, especially with regard to the view that the theism of the *BhG* is part of an epic redaction aimed at fighting

60. Ibid., 165 (this would be the Buddhist poet, but why he would have composed a poem encouraging Arjuna to do battle, Holtzmann did not explain).

61. Hopkins, *The Religions of India*, 389.

62. Émile Senart, *La Bhagavadgītā. Traduite du sanscrit avec une introduction* (Paris: Éditions Bossard, 1922), cited and translated in Frits Staal, *Exploring Mysticism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 86. Staal refers to the introduction as the source, but does not supply a page number.

Buddhism and giving theological support to 'folk' religion as expressed in devotional or *bhakti* practices."⁶³

PANTHEISM AND THE BHAGAVADGĪTĀ

Even before Holtzmann, Western readers of the Bhagavadgītā had been perplexed by its philosophical complexity. In his review of Schlegel's edition, Langlois had written: "Je ne trouve pas dans son [Vyāsa's] poème cette unité de doctrine qui annonce qu'un livre a été conçu par une même tête et exécuté en entier par le même ouvrier."⁶⁴ Nor was the thesis of the Gītā as a work of pantheistic philosophy new. Although he did not use the term itself, Humboldt's paraphrase of certain verses into terms commonly associated with pantheism suggests that he saw proximity between the Gītā's doctrines and the pantheism of Spinoza.⁶⁵ Hegel in contrast did use the term in his review and he intended the characterization to be heard with its full negative force as evidence that Indians lacked a concept of subjectivity. According to him, the monotheism of the Bhagavadgītā (but also of Indian religion in general) was "eben so wesentlich Pantheismus, denn wenn das Eine auch als *Wesen* oder als die Abstraction *des Allgemeinen* bestimmt wird, ist es um dieser Abstraction willen die *Unmittelbarkeit*, und darum allerdings als das *Seyn der Dinge*, immanent und identisch mit ihnen, das Geschöpf insofern nicht von Schöpfer unterschieden; allein dieß immanente Seyn ist darum nicht die concreten und empirischen Dinge und deren Endlichkeiten, sondern vielmehr nur das *Seyn* ihres Daseyns, die unbestimmte Identität."⁶⁶ Thereafter Lorinser had made the term a central principle of his explanation of the Bhagavadgītā, and especially his conviction that the poem, although it combined a theistic Sāṃkhya philosophy with a pantheistic Vedāntic philosophy, could gain the "appearance of a spiritual monism" only through the influence of "Christian ideas."⁶⁷

Pantheism, furthermore, had been a consideration (and source of anxiety) for Europeans interested in Indian thought since at least 1808 when Schlegel had made it a central topic in his *Die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier*. Schlegel had argued that the Bhagavadgītā featured pantheism "as a mere theory and sentiment [blos Denkart und Gesinnung],"⁶⁸ as compared to the more fully developed scientific system found, for example, in Chinese thought. Nonetheless, he thought that even in its relatively

63. Angelika Malinar, *The Bhagavadgītā: Doctrines and Contexts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 21.

64. Langlois, "Bhagavad Gītā id est thespesio melois . . . traduit par M. A. G. de Schlegel," 114.

65. A typical example is his commentary on verses 10.39 and 18.46, which he summarized with the words: "Wie Gott Alles hervorgebracht hat, so ist er auch Alles, und Alles ist in ihm." "Über die unter dem Namen Bhagavad-Gītā bekannte Episode des Mahā-Bhārata I," 199.

66. Hegel, "Ueber die unter dem Namen Bhagavad-Gita bekannte Episode des Mahabharata; von Wilhelm von Humboldt," 64–65 (all emphasis Hegel's).

67. Lorinser, *Die Bhagavad-Gita*, 117, n.1.

68. F. Schlegel, *Die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier*, 247.

less developed form, pantheism was already a sign of degeneracy in Indian thought. According to him, Indian philosophy could be divided into two main periods: “first, the system of emanation, which ultimately degenerated into astrological superstition and indiscriminate [schwärmerischen] materialism; and the doctrine of the two principles [i.e., Sāṃkhya], whose system of dualism was later transformed to pantheism.”⁶⁹ He continued: “The human mind has never fallen further in Oriental philosophy than when it fell into pantheism, which is as pernicious for morality as materialism, and, simultaneously, is also destructive of the imagination [Fantasie].”⁷⁰ In the descending scale along which he arranged philosophical systems, Schlegel thus thought pantheism to be at the lowest end of the scale. It was a perversion of the doctrine of emanation—there are suggestions he identified emanation with the original pure revelation—and, moreover, was morally suspect, leading to materialism, superstition, and an unbridled (and perhaps, for European tastes, monstrous) aesthetic imagination.

When Schlegel used the word “pantheism,” however, he was not doing so as a way of explicating Indian texts (in particular, the Bhagavadgītā). Rather, his central concern was to use Indian texts as a vantage point from which to critique the Protestant Reformation. Notes Benes:

Schlegel’s search for the divine in India aimed to reverse the process of rationalizing religion and naturalizing God that supposedly began with the Protestant Reformation. In his view, ancient Indians had preserved traces of original revelation, but the force of reason within Indian religion and philosophy had wildly distorted God’s word until it culminated in pantheism. By equating the pantheism of ancient India with that pantheism of which contemporary Protestant theology was accused after the Spinoza controversy, *On the Language and Wisdom of the Indians* upheld Catholicism as the religion maintaining the truest ties to original revelation. Recourse to India likewise allowed Schlegel to resuscitate the ancient Germanic tribes as worthy rivals of the classical Greeks, rather than primitive, nomadic inhabitants of the northern forests.⁷¹

A comprehensive account of the history of the concept of pantheism in nineteenth-century German philosophy remains beyond the scope of this book.⁷² Nonetheless, it is important to understand that when Bhagavadgītā scholars invoked the term to explain the poem’s philosophy, they were implicitly drawing upon a long standing tradition. *Pantheism* in the nineteenth century was a loaded word; it had played a major role in one of the central intellectual events of late eighteenth-century Germany and leading lights such as Goethe, Kant, Herder, and Johann Georg Hamann participated

69. Ibid., 253.

70. Ibid.

71. Benes, *In Babel’s Shadow*, 73–74.

72. See, however, Park, “A Catholic Apologist in a Pantheistic World,” for a brief and yet comprehensive look at this question especially as it pertains to the German reception of Indian thought.

in this event. Frederick Beiser in fact considers the so-called pantheism controversy between F. H. Jacobi and Moses Mendelssohn to have been, next to the publication of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* in 1781, "the most significant intellectual event in late eighteenth-century Germany."⁷³ The origins of the debate lay in a controversy surrounding Spinoza's philosophy, which, since it professed materialism and atheism, was considered to be both irreligious and seditious. In the early eighteenth century, the Irish thinker John Toland popularized "pantheism" as a term for the belief in the co-substantiality of the universe with God (though the term was probably first used by Joseph Raphson who in his *De spatio reali* of 1697 "distinguishe[d] it from materialism and atheism"⁷⁴). As such, the charge of having pantheistic sympathies could be a powerful instrument for delegitimizing or damaging a philosopher or a school. The actual pantheism controversy erupted when minor philosopher F. H. Jacobi (almost certainly not without personal animus) disclosed to Elise Reimar (daughter of the Hamburg Orientalist Hermann Samuel Reimar) that Lessing, Enlightenment philosopher and establishment figure, had in his last days revealed to him that he was a committed Spinozist. Jacobi's disclosure was, as Beiser notes, "disingenuous."⁷⁵ He plainly wanted to put Mendelssohn (who was at the time writing a tribute to his friend Lessing) in an awkward position and to discredit the Enlightenment. Revealing, under the "rose of friendship" as he put it in his letter to Reimar, discomfiting facts about one of the leading lights of the Enlightenment was surely a good way to place the entire tradition on the defensive.

Returning to Schlegel and Holtzmann now, we find that the question of whether the Bhagavadgītā professes a pantheistic outlook is immaterial to the text itself.⁷⁶ It was, rather, a question that had specific intellectual, religious and political resonances in Germany of the Goethezeit. To raise the question of the Gītā was already to

73. Frederick C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 44.

74. Ann Thomson, *Bodies of Thought: Science, Religion, and the Soul in the Early Enlightenment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 54.

75. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason*, 62.

76. Indeed, "pantheism" is a misnomer even when applied to ancient Greek (i.e., Platonic and Aristotelian) philosophy. The term's roots lie in a Stoic misinterpretation of the Platonic doctrine of ideas, namely, that every individual object is a perfect realization of its idea. Such a view is far from what Plato and Aristotle held. For them, the idea was a conceptual state of affairs: individual objects realize this state only to a lesser or greater degree depending upon the suitability of their material conditions. Ideas thus always transcend the totality of their manifestations. In contrast, the Stoic view leads to an immanentization of transcendence, since the idea, even though it transcends every individual manifestation, is nonetheless immediately present in them. It is this immanentization of a transcendental condition that is responsible for the pantheistic confusion, as though God himself would be immediately present in each and every one of the objects of his creation. For a discussion of the origins of the pantheistic confusion, see Arbogast Schmitt, "Symmetrie im Platonismus und in der Stoa. Ein antiker Gegensatz und seine Nivellierung in der Renaissance," in *Platon, Plotin und Marsilio Ficino. Studien zu den Vorläufern und zur Rezeption des Florentiner Neuplatonismus, International Symposium, Vienna, October 25–27, 2007*, ed. Maria-Christine Leitgeb, Stéphane Toussaint, and Herbert Bannert (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2009), 13–50.

prejudice significantly its reception.⁷⁷ The “original Gītā” debate, insofar as it rested on the question of the Gītā’s pantheism, was largely a problem of the Germans’ own making. The various reconstructions proposed were, in turn, German solutions to a German problem; it was only logical that Western and Indian scholars would later reject German claims of having evolved a superior approach to the Bhagavadgītā.

It is unclear how much Holtzmann knew of this background. On the whole, we do not have much evidence of a good grasp of European intellectual history in his case (this would also be true of most Indologists after Holtzmann). But it is clear that in taking up the pantheism theory and tying it to a theory of the Indo-Germanic origins of the Bhagavadgītā, he was setting the stage for a charged debate. In keeping with his irrationalist strain, however, he reversed the Schlegelian scheme, according to which pantheism was a sign of philosophical and moral enervation. Schlegel wished to show that it was the Protestant Reformation that had led Europe to pantheism and he used his bipartite analysis of Indian intellectual history to offer a salient example. In contrast, Holtzmann made pantheism the hallmark of the free-thinking, crude and passionate Indo-Germans and claimed that it was the sophistic morals of the Brahmins that had sapped the Indo-Germanic spirit. This difference in views is, of course, easily explained: the neo-Catholic Schlegel was interested in a critique of Indian pantheism as a way of demonstrating the superiority of Catholicism; from his perspective, the theism of Catholicism was preferable to the materialism, naturalism, and atheism of Protestantism. In this context, Indian pantheism could be used to make polemical points about German Protestantism. In contrast, the Protestant Holtzmann was interested in a critique of Indian theism as a way of demonstrating what could happen when unscrupulous priests seized control over a people; from his perspective, the pantheism of the Germanic peoples was preferable to the ritualism, ceremonialism, and papism of Catholicism. Indian pantheism could be used to make polemical points about Roman Catholicism.

While pantheism had already been activated as a way of making points for or against competing versions of Christian faith by European intellectuals before Holtzmann, the Indologist gave a new twist to this practice of using Indian texts as a foil for European anxieties. Schlegel had, to be sure, already used his translation of the Gītā in order to frame the poem in a certain light. Herling, who examines Schlegel’s translation in detail in his book, suggests that Schlegel was motivated by a concern “not only to establish the presence of a philosophical dualism in the *Gītā* but also to show how a pantheistic teaching is consistently interpolated within the text.” “Schlegel,” he argues, “seems to be suggesting, through his translation, that dualism has indeed become philosophically abstract and indeterminate by the time of the *Gītā*, and this development paved the way for pantheistic interventions.”⁷⁸ What

77. Among the criticisms Schlegel raised of pantheism was that it “necessarily abolishes the distinction between good and evil, regardless of how much it may protest in words against this . . .” so that to argue that the Bhagavadgītā was pantheistic was *mutatis mutandis* to argue that it was an unethical or even blasphemous book. F. Schlegel, *Die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier*, 229.

78. Herling, *The German Gītā*, 147–48.

was specifically new about Holtzmann's work, however, was the way he brought the complexity of the Bhagavadgītā as well as the question of its alleged pantheism into relation with a historicist account of the epic's evolution and the latter, in turn, into relation with the task of reconstruction. Schlegel had merely opined that there was a history of ideas in India to be recovered through reading its texts.⁷⁹ Holtzmann, however, went much beyond that. First, he was of the opinion that the prototypical historical text could *itself be recovered through a reconstruction of the available texts*. Second, he explicitly tied the scholarly task to a recovery of the characteristics of the ancient Indo-Germanic peoples. Third, if Schlegel had used nebulous ideas of the original revelation to define the critical project, Holtzmann was drawing on a much richer vocabulary of the original heroic epic culture to enable his reconstruction.

Holtzmann's project was greatly facilitated by the thoroughgoing historicization the Mahābhārata had undergone meanwhile. As we have seen in the first chapter, in his writings on the Mahābhārata he explicitly turned away from literary interpretation to historical reconstruction. In place of the text's own doctrines or purport, he focused exclusively on what the text could tell him about Indian history. This history, moreover, was largely a fetish history, constructed according to his own ideas of a heroic age. Holtzmann was ultimately only interested in using the text to confirm his ideas: of the Indo-Germanic peoples, of warrior ethics, of corruption by the priests, and so on. The history he aspired to was not an objective history, but an a priori history that could let him account for certain events in his contemporary situation (e.g., the dangers to the German people posed by unbridled priests). By historicizing the Mahābhārata, Holtzmann laid the foundation not only for later German views of the Indian people (for example, the pervasive misidentification of Germans with heroic ideals to be seen in the work of later Indologists such as J. W. Hauer), but also for an interpretive matrix later scholars could draw on (as Hopkins, for example, did when he distinguished between "epic" and "pseudoepic"⁸⁰). In various forms and outgrowths, these historicist categories would define German scholarship on the epic and, beyond it, on Indian texts in general. As we shall see, this was to be especially true of the German reception of the Bhagavadgītā.

79. Likewise, though cited by Holtzmann as support for his views, von Humboldt had merely speculated about the possibility of changes. Humboldt, in fact, had argued that the possibility of there being changes in the Bhagavadgītā could not be satisfactorily settled and, what is more important, had pointed out that the very question was problematic, since it would undermine the possibility of a consistent interpretation such as his own. Humboldt, "Über die unter dem Namen Bhagavad-Gītā bekannte Episode des Mahā-Bhārata I," 333 and 334. Holtzmann, however, rejected these considerations. For him, the possibility of a recovery of a heroic Indo-Germanic antiquity and, coupled with it, a new sense of Germany's spiritual and political mission were ultimately too seductive. Further, textual criticism, as he noted in the first chapter of his 1892 book, promised to keep a generation of German scholars profitably employed.

80. See his *The Great Epic of India*, cited earlier. Hopkins uses the term throughout, but does not provide a definition. Although this work is cited by most scholars as the source of the term, it is actually introduced earlier in his "The Social and Military Position of the Ruling Caste in Ancient India," 57–376, although used there in a more restricted sense as referring to the "the part of this Epic embraced by the twelfth and thirteenth books." *Ibid.*, 57, n.

THE THEISTIC GĪTĀ OF RICHARD GARBE

Richard Karl von Garbe (1857–1927) was the first scholar to enter the “original Gītā” debate with an edition published in 1905 (2nd revised edition in 1921).⁸¹ Garbe was the son of a landed factory owner and thus at first glance an unlikely figure to enter the debate.⁸² Yet as the successor to Rudolf von Roth’s chair at Tübingen, Garbe was also the senior figure in Germany on the history of religions in India. It was thus unlikely that he could stay out of the debate long, especially as Holtzmann’s contentions regarding the relative antiquity of the pantheistic perspective directly challenged his teacher’s prestige (Rudolf von Roth had focused mainly upon the Veda, considered until then to be the oldest part of the Indian canon). Garbe thus occupies a crucial place in the history of the Indological Gītā. First, with his criticisms of Holtzmann, he brought the latter’s work to a larger audience. Second, his edition was to be hugely influential on the next half century of German Gītā scholarship. His student, Rudolf Otto, dedicated his own reconstruction and translation of the Gītā to Garbe and almost every figure in German Bhagavadgītā studies in the early twentieth century (and beyond it) took a stance on his thesis that the Bhagavadgītā was originally theistic in spirit. Garbe is also important, because, as was mentioned earlier, he gives voice to the awareness of a break with the Romantic tradition.⁸³ Even though this break had occurred much earlier (e.g., in the work of Bopp), Garbe thus became a signpost for a new, more positivist phase in the German reception of the Bhagavadgītā.

Before we look at the main problems with his interpretation of the text, let us look at the basic contours of his reconstruction. Garbe accepted Holtzmann’s thesis of a contradiction between the text’s so-called pantheistic and theistic elements and argued that “as a matter of fact, our inquiry, which aims to distinguish the older and younger components of the Gita from each other, must set out from this contradiction.”⁸⁴ “But,” he argued, “in my opinion, it [our inquiry] may not be conducted along the lines Holtzmann’s was” and he stated: “The entire character of the poem is, according to its nature and its structure, overwhelmingly *theistic*.”⁸⁵ “A personal god, Kṛṣṇa, appears in the form of a human hero, presents his doctrines, demands besides the fulfillment of duty, above all, faithful love to him and surrender of the listener, reveals himself then out of especial grace in his heavenly, though still humanlike,

81. Garbe was ennobled in 1909 and thereafter styled himself “Richard von Garbe.” Hereafter, this chapter follows the preference for referring to him as “Richard Garbe.”

82. See Angelika Malinar, “‘Kṣatriya-Glaube’ und ‘Opferwesen’: Richard Garbe und die indischen Religionen,” in *Indien-Forschung im Zeitenwandel. Analysen und Dokumente zur Indologie und Religionswissenschaft in Tübingen*, ed. Heidrun Brückner, Klaus Butzenberger, Angelika Malinar, and Gabriele Zeller (Tübingen: Attempto Verlag, 2003), 122.

83. “The period, in which the Bhag., because of the sublimity of its thoughts and ideas, stimulated nothing but enthusiasm and fascination in Europe, are long past. We have . . . become more sober and critical and do not close our eyes to the obvious failings and weaknesses of the poem.” Garbe, *Die Bhagavadgītā*, 11–12.

84. *Ibid.*, 14.

85. *Ibid.* (Garbe’s emphasis).

form, and promises the believer that, as a reward for his love for god, he will enter him after death, [i.e.,] will attain the presence of god.”⁸⁶ Garbe acknowledged that, “*alongside* this god, who has been made as personal as possible and who dominates the entire poem, we occasionally find as highest principle the impersonal, neutral Brahman, the Absolute.”⁸⁷ He also conceded that the two doctrines, “the theistic and the pantheistic,” “interpenetrated each other[,]...at times follow[ing] each other completely without mediation, at times in loose connection.” But he cautioned against viewing the one as a “lower, exoteric [doctrine] and the other as a higher, esoteric doctrine.” He rejected that the worship of Kṛṣṇa was an exoteric doctrine intended for lay readers, expressing the insight into Brahman in simpler, more accessible form. Rather, “the two forms of faith are dealt with almost throughout as though there were absolutely no difference between them, neither according to value nor according to content.”⁸⁸

Against Humboldt’s theory that the Bhagavadgītā was the work of a poet, who spoke from out of the flow of his imagination, Garbe argued that the poem was “not a ‘work of art created by the synoptic vision of a genius’.” In his opinion, although “the swing of enthusiasm [could] be felt at times,” the Gītā’s sentiments were “not infrequently” “hollow, empty words.” “[A] thought that has already been expressed often is repeated; at times the linguistic expression is completely inadequate.” Garbe therefore argued for viewing the Gītā as a “rather artificial didactic poem” created to enable the “dissemination of specific religious [and] philosophical thoughts.” In order to resolve these contradictions (i.e., between the Bhagavadgītā’s theistic and pantheistic strains and between its poetic and less poetic, more doctrinal passages), Garbe advocated a method of historical comparison. In his opinion, the only way to account for the dissonance was to assume that “one of the two contradictory doctrines placed in the mouth of Krishna, the personal god” was “a later ingredient.” And then he argued: “when this is so, will we really be able to seriously doubt that it is the pantheistic doctrine that has to be excised and not, as Holtzmann thought, the theistic?”⁸⁹ He countered the objection that “the *Indians* did not see a contradiction in [the Gītā’s] combination of theism and pantheism,” with the words: “The identification of Kṛṣṇa with Brahman, his interpretation as the All-Soul belongs to a later period than the original Bhagavadgītā, a period that is dominated by syncretic tendencies. We can demonstrate this from the Bhagavadgītā as *handed down*.”⁹⁰ Garbe thus problematically placed an a priori theory of the Bhagavadgītā (the apparent contradiction between the Gītā’s pantheism and theism, we must remember, arose only for German readers in light of a late eighteenth-century controversy) above its reception in the Indian tradition. Moreover, he failed to see that his proposed means of demonstrating the Gītā’s lack of unity was circular. If what is at stake is whether Kṛṣṇa was identified with Brahman at a later stage, then this identification cannot itself be

86. Ibid., 14–15.

87. Ibid., 15 (Garbe’s emphasis).

88. Ibid., 15.

89. Ibid., 16.

90. Ibid., 17 (all emphasis Garbe’s).

used as evidence that it occurred at a later stage. The idea of identification is itself in question and no amount of fudging the question of whether it happened earlier or later will get us over that problem. An Indian reader, for instance, would not say Kṛṣṇa was “identified” with Brahman; for him, Kṛṣṇa *is* Brahman. The remainder of Garbe’s reconstruction also shared in this circularity. Stating that “Kṛṣṇa, as is well known [bekanntlich], is held to be the All-Being only in the more recent portions of the Mbh.; the Gītā, however, does not belong to the later insertions,”⁹¹ Garbe suggested that this demonstrated the impossibility of Kṛṣṇa’s (pantheistic) identification with Brahman being original to the poem. As he put it, “even in the revised form in which it is present to us now, the Bhag. is rightly considered one of the older episodes of the Mbh.; indeed, Holtzmann would like to ‘assign the oldest portions of the Bhag. without hesitation to the old poem [i.e., Holtzmann’s old heroic epic]’.”⁹² And since he had stated that Kṛṣṇa “as is well known” is identified with Brahman only in the more recent portions of the Mahābhārata, he considered it settled that the Bhagavadgītā could not have been pantheistic.

The circularity of this argument escaped Garbe. In the absence of evidence for the relative dates of different sections of the epic, any claims about what the older epic or the older Gītā contained were fated to be circular. Garbe, of course, lacked sensitivity to these problems. For him, it was a settled matter that the Gītā, being partly pantheistic and partly theistic, was a composite text; the question could only be, which was more original. And since he, no less than Holtzmann, considered it a relatively straightforward matter to identify the “older” layers of the Bhagavadgītā, he thought he could confidently demonstrate that “the identification of Kṛṣṇa with Brahman...belongs to a later period than the original Bhagavadgītā.” Thus even though Garbe and Holtzmann were at odds with each other over the character of the original Gītā (each for reasons having to do with the uses to which he wished to put a history of religions in India), they still shared certain basic assumptions about epic scholarship, above all, that the age of passages could be determined on the basis of *a priori* ideas of antiquity. For Holtzmann, these ideas had to do with his interest in a heroic Indo-Germanic people. For Garbe, they had to do with his interest in demonstrating a rationalistic core to Indian thought. And yet, for all their difference on this one point, the story they told about the epic was remarkably similar. For both, the epic was a composite text. For both, the epic had originated in heroic circles (Indo-Germanic for Holtzmann; Kṣatriya for Garbe). For both, the epic had undergone a process of decline. For both, this decline was to be attributed to the Brahmans (they merely differed on the question of whether the Brahmans had corrupted the text through their theism or their pantheism). And for both, the question could be settled simply by taking a look at the text itself. As an example of this reconstructive method, let us look at some of Garbe’s arguments.

91. Ibid.

92. Ibid.

Garbe presented eight main arguments for seeing the Bhagavadgītā as a theistic work:

1. He cited Gītā 7.19, which says, “‘At the end of many lifetimes, the sage approaches me with the thought “Vāsudeva is everything.” Such a noble-minded one is very hard to find’” and interpreted this passage as evidence that “Kṛṣṇa is very rarely interpreted as the All (or as Brahman), but rather almost always as a personal god.” “Does not the redactor,” asked Garbe, “tell us in clear language here, *that the equation of Kṛṣṇa with Brahman was originally unfolding in his time?*”⁹³
2. He argued that “Kṛṣṇa in the Gītā is at first only sparsely identified with Brahman.” “At times the terms Kṛṣṇa and Brahman are placed close to each other as distinct [terms] so that we almost have the impression that the redactor shied away from asserting the identity of Kṛṣṇa and Brahman too forcefully in light of the evidently theistic character of his original.”⁹⁴
3. Garbe further pointed out that in verse 8.1, “Arjuna asks ‘what is this Brahman?’ and Kṛṣṇa does not respond in verse [8.]3 with ‘I am it,’ but ‘Brahman is the imperishable highest.’”⁹⁵ He took this as evidence that Kṛṣṇa, at least in the original poem, was distinct from Brahman.
4. Garbe claimed that “Kṛṣṇa and Brahman are expressly distinguished from each other. They are not only two here, but also throughout the poem as a whole (ignoring precisely the passages where the Vedāntic redactor completely identified and mixed the two notions with each other).”⁹⁶
5. According to him, “in the old poem, Kṛṣṇa referred to himself—and Arjuna to Kṛṣṇa—as an individual, a person, a specific divinity; [whereas] in the ingredients of the revision the neutral Brahman appears as the highest concept and is occasionally equated with Kṛṣṇa.”⁹⁷ From this he concluded: “in a nutshell: *the old poem proclaimed a [religion of] Kṛṣṇaism philosophically founded on the basis of Sāṃkhya-Yoga; the elements of the revision preach Vedāntic philosophy.*”⁹⁸
6. Garbe also cited the general opinion, “known since a long time,” “that the doctrines of Sāṃkhya-Yoga are the foundations of the philosophical observations of the Bhag. and Vedānta steps back significantly next to them.”⁹⁹ As further evidence, he cited the fact that the former are frequently mentioned in the poem “by name”; in contrast, “Vedānta only occurs once (*vedāntakṛt*, 15.15) and that, too, in the sense of an Upaniṣad!”¹⁰⁰

93. Ibid., 18 (Garbe’s emphasis). Garbe’s translation in the original reads: “Am Ende von vielen Existenzen naht der Erkennende sich mir mit dem Gedanken ‘Vāsudeva ist das All.’ Solch ein Hochsinniger ist sehr schwer zu finden.”

94. Ibid., 19.

95. Ibid., 19.

96. Ibid., 20.

97. Ibid., 20.

98. Ibid., 20 (Garbe’s emphasis).

99. Ibid., 20–21.

100. Ibid., 21. Garbe footnotes this line with the words “in general, Vedānta consistently has this meaning in the Mbh.” Ibid., 21, n. 1.

7. "If we keep in mind the irreconcilable opposition of Sâṃkhya-Yoga and Vedânta, which can only be eliminated by distinguishing between old and new, the Vedântic components of the Bhag. once again appear as nonoriginal." "Irrespective of whether we examine the Gîtâ from the religious or the philosophical side, in both cases we gain the same result."¹⁰¹
8. He concluded with the triumphant declaration: "It became clear to me that in the wake of this excision [i.e., in Garbe's reconstruction], no real gap arises in the Bhag.; rather, *the context, which is now interrupted, is restored in several passages.*"¹⁰²

In spite of the name "critical method," however, there is really nothing critical about Garbe's efforts. The problems with his arguments are many; we present a few here:

1. As regards the first argument, Garbe confused a statement made in the context of a doctrine of metempsychosis with a statement made in historical time. Whereas the passage explicitly refers to the "many lifetimes" (*bahūnāṃ janmanām*, Bhagavadgītā 7.19a) required to arrive at the insight "Vāsudeva is everything" (*vāsudevaḥ sarvaṃ iti*, 7.19b), Garbe took it to refer to the passage of years necessary before the poet or redactor could assert the identity of Kṛṣṇa and Brahman.
2. Arguments 2, 4, 5 and 7 are all circular, since they invoke either the early or late passages of the poem as support for Garbe's thesis, when what is at stake is precisely whether different passages of the Bhagavadgītā are of different ages.
3. The question "what is this *Brahman*?" (*kiṃ tad brahma*) can simply be a request for clarification about the nature of Brahman rather than a request for identification. Especially as a philosophical concept, introduced by *kiṃ* (what) rather than *kaḥ* (who), the passage seems to require the kind of conceptual explanation Kṛṣṇa provides rather than the kind of demonstrative response Garbe imagines. Further, Arjuna's initial question is followed by a series of others, all of which request information about various entities and are introduced by the same interrogative: *kiṃ*. In van Buitenen's translation, these verses read: "What is that *brahman*? What is the individual self? What is act, Supreme Person? What is called 'elemental,' and what 'divine'?" (*kiṃ tad brahma kiṃ adhyātmaṃ kiṃ karma puruṣottama | adhibhūtaṃ ca kiṃ proktam adhidaivaṃ kiṃ ucyate ||*, Bhagavadgītā 8.1). Only in the second verse do we get an interrogative pronoun (*kaḥ*), which van Buitenen rightly renders as "who." Arjuna asks, "Who in this body is the 'sacrificial' one, and how is he so, Madhusūdana [an epithet of Kṛṣṇa's]?" to which Kṛṣṇa responds, "I myself am the 'sacrificial' here in this body, O best of the embodied." Clearly Kṛṣṇa is fully capable of distinguishing between interrogative pronouns.

101. Ibid., 21.

102. Ibid., 22–23 (Garbe's emphasis).

4. Regarding Garbe's fifth and sixth arguments, since he does not clarify his sources, it is unclear who (besides himself) is supposed to hold this thesis. Garbe's work on Sāṃkhya is similarly biased so that citing it here is not reliable evidence.¹⁰³ Further, *vedānta* in *vedāntakṛt* (15.15c) is not used in a terminological sense as the designation of a school; Kṛṣṇa only states that he is the maker of the Vedānta, that is, the concluding portion of the Veda or, on an alternative reading, that he puts an end to the knowledge of the Veda (cf. *yāvān artha udapāne sarvataḥ samplutodake | tāvān sarveṣu vedeṣu brāhmaṇasya vijānataḥ |* |, Bhagavadgītā 2.46).
5. Contrary to Garbe's eighth argument, there were many instances in which he completely shattered the connections between individual verses and/or chapters. For instance, the opening verses of chapter eleven depend on the concluding verses of chapter ten. In chapter ten, verses 19–42 Kṛṣṇa presents a list of his divine manifestations (of the Ādityas he is Viṣṇu; of the Vedas, he is the Sāmaveda; of the Rudras, he is Śaṃkara, and so on.) and concludes by saying:

I am whatever is the seed of all creatures, Arjuna. Not a being, standing or moving, can exist without me. There is no limit to my divine ubiquities, enemy-burner: the full extent of my ubiquity I have here merely indicated. Whatever beings have transcending power, luster and might, know that each and everyone of them has its source in a particle of my splendor. But what is the point to you of knowing this much, Arjuna? I support this entire universe with but a single portion of mine! (Bhagavadgītā 10.39–42.)

In chapter 12, Arjuna resumes the conversation, stating: "This ultimate mystery bearing upon the soul, which you have propounded to me as a favor, has dispelled my delusion. I have heard from you in all detail the becoming and unbecoming of the creatures, lotus-eyed one, and your own indestructible greatness. Now I wish to set eye on your real, supernal form, just as you have described yourself, sovereign lord, Supreme Person! If you think that I shall be able to look upon it, lord, master of Yoga, display to me your imperishable person" (Bhagavadgītā 12.1–3). In Garbe's reconstruction, however, chapter 10 ends with verse 11 ("Residing in their own very being I compassionately dispel the darkness of their ignorance with the shining lamp of knowledge") thus leaving chapter 12 hanging in the air. In similar fashion, although he implied that his emendations to chapter 2 (deletion of verses 17 and 72) restored the original context, he actually disrupted the text, since the truth of verse 17 is assumed in verse 18 while verse 72 is the necessary and logical conclusion to Kṛṣṇa's description of the man of stable disposition (*stithaprajña*) beginning with verse 55. Verse 72, furthermore, caps this train of thoughts and chapter 2 as a whole; it describes the state of the man established in Brahman (*eṣā brāhmī stithi...*). Without it, there is a very real sense of something missing. Verse 71, with which

103. See Nicholson, *Unifying Hinduism*, 67–68 and see also the extended argument from 70–74.

Garbe concludes the chapter, is very much like the preceding verses; it is a description of the man of stable disposition, but does not step outside these descriptions to provide a reflexive summary of the entire section (as verse 72 does). Evidently, Garbe's main reason for rejecting it is that it contains the word "Brahman" and thus was unpalatable to him. Later scholars from Jacobi to Oldenberg, too, would point out that Garbe's version of the Gītā was not more consistent than the original, but he remained oblivious to these criticisms.

On the whole, then, Garbe's reconstruction was logically and epistemologically flawed. He misused the available evidence, citing selectively from the text in pursuit of rhetorical and ideological ends. And some of his arguments were simply nonsense.¹⁰⁴ Yet, drawing on these arguments, he proposed a radically pared Gītā as the original. "In this way, of the 700 verses of the Bhag., 170 fall out of consideration; if [however] one subtracts the 24 verses at the beginning and end of the poem, which in any case do not belong to the genuine Gītā, then 146 or more than a fifth of the whole [do not belong to the original poem]."¹⁰⁵ He was careful to note, however, that he did not harbor "the delusion" that he had succeeded in eliminating "all the non-genuine portions of the Bhag. in this manner,"¹⁰⁶ for, "there could still be some other verses that were added at the time of the revision, verses of which not a word was to be found in the original poem." "But," he added, "we lack the resources to be able to recognize them and I do not wish to commit myself to mere assumptions[!]."¹⁰⁷ Garbe found additional support for his reconstruction in a literary consideration. He cited Winternitz's view of the original Bhagavadgītā as having been the work of a true and great poet and then noted, almost bashfully, that he (i.e., Winternitz) had pointed out that "among the 170 or so verses" excised by Garbe as non-genuine "for their Vedāntic or orthodox Brahmanic character," he could find "at most ten or twelve . . . with some poetic merit."¹⁰⁸ Although he himself had not undertaken "this aesthetic reflection" in his first edition, Garbe confessed that, "following Winternitz'

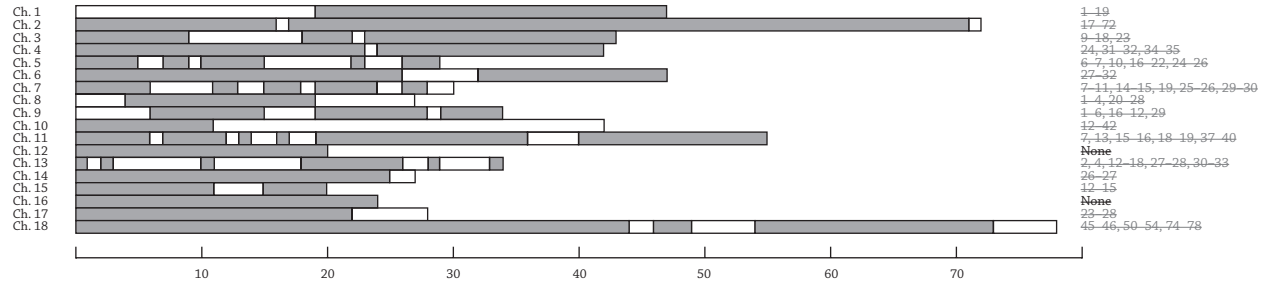
104. Evidently, neither Garbe nor Winternitz (who echoes him on this point, writing: "when one, along with Garbe, eliminates all the verses that represent the standpoint of the Vedānta and of the orthodox Brahmanic religion, not only does a gap not arise anywhere in the text, but rather, not infrequently the uninterrupted context is restored through the exclusion of the verses printed in small font"; Winternitz, *Review of Vier philosophischen Texte aus dem Mahābhārata*, 196) seemed to realize that the argument that no gap arose upon elimination could be extended ad absurdum: theoretically the Bhagavadgītā could be reduced to any two well-connected verses. As a criterion for the elimination of verses, the requirement "no gap may arise" suffers from *ativyāptidoṣa* (it is overly broad or overly generic).

105. Garbe, *Die Bhagavadgītā*, 24.

106. Ibid. (Garbe's emphasis).

107. Ibid.

108. Ibid. The reference is to Winternitz' review of Deussen and Strauss, cited earlier. In his *Indien und das Christentum: Eine Untersuchung der religionsgeschichtlichen Zusammenhänge* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1914), Garbe accepted Winternitz' suggestion that "at least another 200 verses" ought to be eliminated, dropping the entire twelfth, thirteenth, fourteenth, fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth chapters and all but 12 verses of the eighteenth (for a total of 218 additional verses). See *ibid.*, 232. n. 1 and see charts 3.1 and 3.2 comparing Garbe's two Gītās.

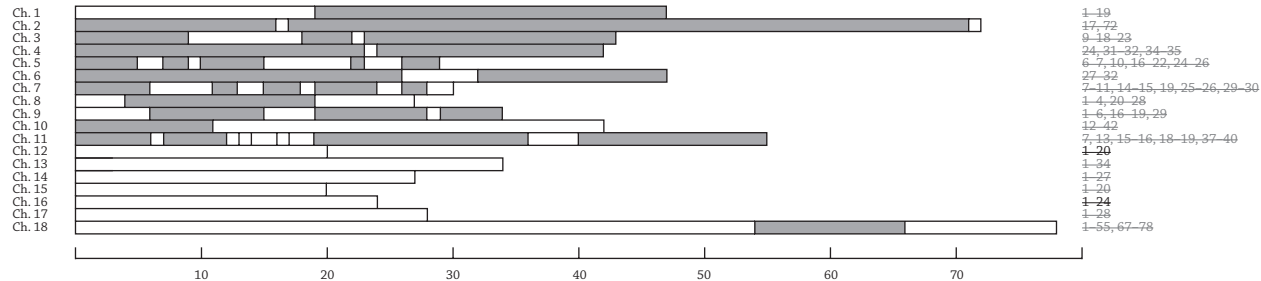


Graph of the Bhagavadgītā, showing Garbe's deletions of the text in pursuit of an "original" Gītā. At a little over 73.8% of the text, chapter 10 undergoes the most loss (31 of a total of 42 verses deleted). In all, Garbe excises 172 verses of the text and keeps 528 or about three-quarters (75.43%) of the text.

In this graph, each unit on the bottom scale is equal to one verse; white portions indicate Garbe's Strikethrough numbers indicate deleted verses

Chart 3.1

Garbe's deletions and the fragmentation of the text



Garbe's revises Gītā, incorporating the suggestions made in Winternitz 1907 (see Garbe 1914). The Bhagavadgītā has shrunk to less than half (49.57%) of its original length (an additional 175 verses deleted).

In this graph, each unit on the bottom scale is equal to one verse; white portions indicate Garbe's Strikethrough numbers indicate deleted verses

Chart 3.2

Garbe's second attempt at isolating a "theistic Gītā"

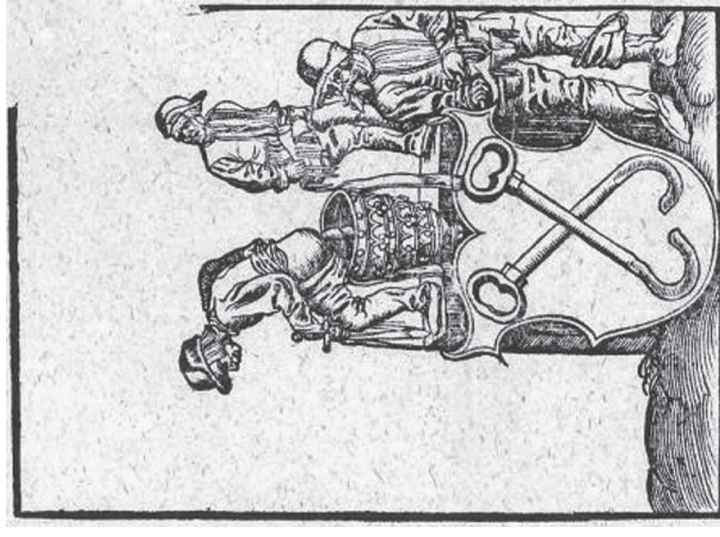


Image 3.1 and 3.2: Setting the tone for the Indologists' rancor toward the Brahmins: 'The Papstspotbilder from 1545' (from a series of nine illustrations commissioned from the workshop of Lucas Cranach the Elder by Martin Luther for his "Depiction of the Papacy" of 1545; collection of the British Museum)

hint," he was "convinced that the Bhag. as reconstructed by [him] significantly exceed[ed] the transmitted text in poetic beauty and coherence."¹⁰⁹

Although Garbe disagreed with Holtzmann's reconstruction of the original Gītā, his views of the poem's origins were thus remarkably similar to those of the Mahābhārata scholar. In fact, it seems that for all their differences, he had been heavily influenced by ideas of a Kṣatriya religion—ideas that can ultimately be traced back to the work of Lassen and Holtzmann. For instance, Garbe wrote, "in the time when the Kṣatriyas had a prominent role in the formation of spiritual life in India—in my opinion, they were the leaders [of their people]—the militant warrior Kṛṣṇa, the son of Vasudeva and Devakī, founded a monotheistic religion. This religion first spread among the members of his tribe, the Yādavas, Sātvas or Vṛṣṇis, and then spread beyond the boundaries of the tribal community."¹¹⁰ As evidence for this theory, Garbe pointed to the "older portions" of the Mahābhārata, where Kṛṣṇa "played a role... as a warrior, a counselor, and the proclaimer of religious doctrines." Garbe also defended the tribal origins of the god Kṛṣṇa on the grounds that his "patronym Vāsudeva (in a broader sense and earlier than the personal name) appears as a name for god, at first especially among the tribe to which Kṛṣṇa, according to the epic, belongs." "This circumstance," he argued, "is of especial significance because the divinization of the founders of sects is common practice in India today and not just first... since the Neo-Brahmanism of the 12th century AD." Holtzmann had earlier suggested that Kṛṣṇa was the leader of a tribe, who had later undergone a process of apotheosis and identification with the Brahmanic deity Viṣṇu. Garbe agreed with this assessment, but added that Kṛṣṇa was also the founder of a religion. "From the tangle of sagas, legends, and myths that cover over the character of Kṛṣṇa" he wrote, "[the figure of a] victorious hero, who was simultaneously the successful founder of a religion reveals itself as the kernel [of truth at the heart of these legends]."¹¹¹ He rejected Holtzmann's thesis that "two different individuals were united in the [character of] Kṛṣṇa of the epic," arguing that "the contradictions [in Kṛṣṇa's depiction in the epic] were explained completely satisfactorily by the revision of the old Kuru epic, for which Kṛṣṇa was a man full of malice and deceit, into the present Pāṇḍava epic, which glorifies Kṛṣṇa as a friend and helper."¹¹² In his opinion, an "impartial historical observation of the sources shows that Kṛṣṇa in the most ancient period was a man and later—in a continual development—became a demigod, god, and All-Being."¹¹³ He criticized the view that Kṛṣṇa was an incarnation of God as an "inversion of the real relationship" and a "myth of transformation," arguing instead that, "in our case, euhemerism is the correct view."¹¹⁴

Concerning the religion (allegedly) founded by Kṛṣṇa, Garbe argued that the "original essence" of this religion was that it was "popular, independent of both the Vedic

109. Ibid., 24–25.

110. Ibid., 27.

111. Ibid., 28.

112. Ibid., 28–29.

113. Ibid., 31.

114. Ibid., 31.

tradition and Brahmanism, and that it probably emphasized the moral side from the beginning, which had been lacking in Brahmanic religion and philosophy.”¹¹⁵ And then he noted: “*Kṛṣṇaism was by nature an ethical Kṣatriya religion.*”¹¹⁶ In defense of this view, Garbe cited Mahābhārata 6.3044 and 6.3045. He argued that as both these passages address Madhusūdana (i.e., Kṛṣṇa) as the “refuge of the noble *royal* sages, who do not waver in battle and work to fulfill all their duties,” there was reason for thinking that the origin of the “Bhāgavata religion” was to be found in “Kṣatriya circles.”¹¹⁷ He also cited Bhagavadgītā 4.1, a passage already cited by Holtzmann as evidence of the heroic origins of the Bhagavadgītā, but noted in a footnote that Holtzmann had gotten it wrong: it was not that kings rather than priests had been the old guardians merely of the Bhagavadgītā; rather, they (i.e., the kings) had been the “old guardians of the Yoga doctrine presented in the Bhag.”¹¹⁸

In many respects, then, the story Garbe recounted of the Gītā was the same as that recounted by Holtzmann. He shared the latter’s view of the epic as originally the property of the Kṣatriya caste, and of the Bhagavadgītā (or at least its oldest portions) as a faithful facsimile of the ideology of the old epic. In fact, since he cited Holtzmann’s work throughout rather than Lassen’s (the other possible candidate from whom he could have acquired his ideas of heroic epic), there is good reason for thinking that, for all his narcissism of small differences, he was actually a Holtzmannian critic. And, though he disagreed with Holtzmann on minor details, he also significantly carried forward the Holtzmannian project of establishing an ancient Indo-Germanic warrior tradition (e.g., by introducing a theory of “Kṛṣṇaism” as an ethical warrior religion). Like Holtzmann, he thought that “a historical core” lay “buried” in the story of “Kṛṣṇa’s participation in the battle of the Pāṇḍavas with the Kauravas”¹¹⁹ and, again like Holtzmann, he thought that this core could be unearthed by historical scholarship. Here too, there were no surprises about his solution: like Lassen and Holtzmann before him, he turned to the names of the characters Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa to understand their historical relationship. Writes Garbe:

Earlier, I resolutely combated the theory of Kṛṣṇa’s mythic origin. When I first considered its likelihood, I was for a time in doubt about whether it was not, after all, correct given Arjuna’s name. The two names Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, black and white, spontaneously generate the impression that they are allegorical or naturalistic. But such impressions based on the etymology of names have too often led to error and caused allegorical or other deep explanations, when the simplest and most natural interpretation was in order. . . . When two people with these names are found in a close relationship, this is certainly conspicuous. But we do not, for that reason,

115. Ibid., 32

116. Ibid., 32 (Garbe’s emphasis).

117. Ibid., 32–33 (Garbe’s emphasis). In the original, Garbe’s translation reads: “Du, O Madhu-Töter, bist die Zuflucht der edlen *königlichen* Weisen, die in den Schlachten nicht weichen und sich der Erfüllung aller Pflichten befeleißigen.”

118. Ibid., 33, n. 1.

119. Ibid., 34.

have to see in them a personification of day and night and so on; rather, there are two simple possibilities of explanation. *Either* the character of Arjuna was freely invented as a counterpart to Kṛṣṇa at a time when the latter was already a legendary figure; in such cases, the [common] folk loves a parallel between the names, and especially in this case the name Arjuna would have had a twofold justification for the hero, in whom the lineage of the Pāṇḍavas, that is, of the sons of *the White One* was, so to speak, individualized. *Or*, there really existed a friend and follower of Kṛṣṇa among the Pāṇḍavas with the name Arjuna.¹²⁰

We have discussed the problems with Lassen's and Holtzmann's pseudohistorical approach at length in the earlier chapters and know by now that this approach is based on very flimsy grounds. The names of characters in the epic resist historical attributions. The color white, for instance, has philosophical resonances: in the Nārāyaṇīya of the Mahābhārata, white is the color of the pure souls who worship Nārāyaṇa; Sāṃkhya frequently uses the colors white, black, and red as a means of classifying pure, impure, and mixed souls. But from Lassen to Schroeder, the Mahābhārata critics insisted that it was the central principle for an interpretation of the Mahābhārata.¹²¹ Garbe, too, cited Lassen, but questioned his simplistic identification, noting that in the Mahābhārata Arjuna, too, was frequently referred to as "dark-skinned."¹²²

Garbe interpreted the Bhagavadgītā as a doctrinal text, specifically, as "*the textbook of the Bhāgavatas*."¹²³ He suggested that "the *doctrines of the genuine Bhagavadgītā*"¹²⁴ could be reduced to twelve as follows:

1. "God is . . . a conscious, eternal, and all-powerful being, the 'endless great lord of the world' (X.3)."¹²⁵
2. "He is not only different from the ephemeral world, but also from the imperishable spirit of all beings (XV.17–19), hence spirit in a different and higher sense than as the Ātman of all beings."¹²⁶
3. "When it is said in VII.4–5 that God possesses two natures, a higher spiritual one through which the world is preserved and a lower, material one which consists of everything that, according to Sāṃkhya belongs to Prakṛti, this is not to be understood as though matter constitutes half of his [i.e., God's] essence. Rather, what is meant is that matter does not unfold independently, following its own drives, but rather, under God's guidance; with other words: that God is effective in matter and acts through it."¹²⁷

120. Ibid., 36–37 (Garbe's emphasis).

121. See Lassen's writings, cited earlier. Schroeder's comments can be found in his *Indiens Literatur und Cultur in historischer Entwicklung: Ein Cyklus von fünfzig Vorlesungen* (Leipzig: Haessel, 1887), 457–79.

122. Garbe, *Die Bhagavadgītā*, 36, n. 1.

123. Ibid., 52 (Garbe's emphasis).

124. Ibid., 56 (emphasis in original).

125. Ibid., and cf. also *ibid.* "Herr der Wunderkraft" for *yogeśvara*.

126. Ibid.

127. Ibid.

4. In spite of the Sāṃkhya origins of this doctrine, the “interpretation of the spiritual principle in the Bhag. is essentially different as compared to the Sāṃkhya system, [it is] not exclusively philosophical, but rather overwhelmingly religious.”¹²⁸
5. Garbe argued that this confusion of philosophical systems was responsible for the fact that “now one [and] now the other perspective was advanced.” Further, since “at times,” the “ideal of quietism was practically placed above that of activity,” “all sorts of inconsistencies and unclarities arose, inconsistencies and unclarities that could have been avoided by decisively rejecting the quietistic perspective.”¹²⁹
6. “In general [, however,] in the view of the Bhag., salvific knowledge [erlösende Erkenntnis] is not restricted to the distinction between matter and spirit; rather, this distinction may only be regarded as a precondition for *knowledge of God*, which, in truth, first leads man to the highest salvation [Heile].”¹³⁰
7. According to Garbe, the imperative to act only in the spirit of selflessly performing one’s duty “necessitated a rejection of Vedic ritual [Werkdienstes], which [rejection] is expressed without any reservation in the original Gītā.” “All ceremonies of Brahmanic ritual[,] serv[ing] only personal desires,” are “in sharp contrast to the ethical ideal of the Gītā.”¹³¹ The Gītā, he argued, expressed “open sarcasm of the promises of the Veda, which relates only to the material world and offers only transient reward.”¹³²
8. Translating *bhakti* as “faithful and trusting love of God [gläubigen und vertrauensvollen Gottesliebe],” Garbe argued that it was “the most important demand” the Bhagavadgītā made of “the individual in search of salvation.”¹³³ According to him, “from love of God arose the *knowledge of God* [Gotteserkenntnis] (XVIII.55), and it caused the faithful [der Gläubige] to direct all his *works* toward God and leave the success to him.”¹³⁴
9. The Bhagavadgītā, according to him, did not describe “the condition of the saved soul” as the “extinction of consciousness for all eternity.” Rather, it understood salvation as “a condition of blissful peace of the individual soul which continues to exist [after its death] albeit in the presence of God.” Garbe argued that this “view originated in the oldest period of the Bhāgavata religion and had always been a pillar of this faith; that is why even after its embellishment with elements of Sāṃkhya-Yoga it could not be displaced by the contrary doctrine of the two systems [i.e., of Sāṃkhya and Yoga].”¹³⁵
10. In support of his thesis that salvation in the Bhagavadgītā originally did not imply loss of selfhood but eternal existence as a distinct self in the presence

128. Ibid., 59.

129. Ibid., 60.

130. Ibid., 61 (Garbe’s emphasis).

131. Ibid.

132. Ibid., 61–62.

133. Ibid., 62–63.

134. Ibid., 63 (all emphasis Garbe’s).

135. Ibid., 63.

of God, Garbe cited verse 7.23. This verse, he argued, was evidence that “merging into the Devās (or Pitaras [sic] and Bhūtāni IX.25) can simply imply continued conscious existence of an individual being.” Garbe argued that where the text spoke of “merging into Kṛṣṇa (or God),” “because of the parallelism and the agreement of the expression (yā with the accusative),” “nothing else” was to be “understood under *this* merging [than the “continued conscious existence of an individual being” already seen in the case of merging into the Devās, etc.].”¹³⁶

11. Further, he pointed out that, verse 14.2 described the saved as *mama sādharmyam āgatāḥ*. The expression *sādharmya*, he argued, did “not mean unity, oneness, identity (*aikya*, *aikātmya*, *tādātmya*), but *qualitative equality*.” “From this it follows that salvation according to the Bhag. is to be thought of as the elevation of the soul to an existence similar to God’s, [and] as continued individual existence in the presence of God.”¹³⁷
12. Garbe also extended these reflections concerning the Bhagavadgītā to the Mahābhārata as a whole. He argued that these doctrines (i.e., concerning the theistic nature of worship and the personal nature of salvation) were present not only in the Bhagavadgītā but were “also presented in other passages of the Mbh.” Indeed, he claimed that the Bhagavadgītā was “the source from which these doctrines ha[d] poured themselves into other portions of the epic. . . .”¹³⁸

Earlier we had seen that Garbe’s arguments for the theistic Gītā as being the original were quite jejune. Why then insist on a reconstruction of “the *doctrines of the genuine Bhagavadgītā*”¹³⁹ based on those very same arguments? Clearly, something else was at stake in this reconstruction than substantive considerations. What made Garbe insist on portraying the Bhagavadgītā as a rational, monotheistic faith with Christian ethical overtones?

To understand what was at stake for Garbe in this reconstruction, we must turn back to the pantheism controversy of late eighteenth-century Germany. Though it has received little attention from historians, this controversy was the central source of influence on German Indology in the twentieth century. In its continuing evolution, German scholarship on the Bhagavadgītā after the mid-nineteenth century is best understood as a series of responses to this controversy. Although it originated in a debate between F. H. Jacobi and Moses Mendelssohn, the pantheism controversy quickly became a salient concern of Indian studies in Germany after the publication of Schlegel’s *Die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier* in 1808. Though ostensibly a work on Indian philosophy, Schlegel’s book was in reality a broadside against Protestantism in which Schlegel used Indian thought as a means of exploring the decline into pantheism. In the story he told, pantheism emerged from an excessive (and hubristic) rationalism. “Pantheism is the system of pure reason; thus it already marks the transition from Oriental philosophy to European philosophy. It

136. Ibid., 64.

137. Ibid., 65 (Garbe’s emphasis).

138. Ibid.

139. Ibid., 56 (emphasis in original).

flatters man's conceit as much as his indolence. Once this great discovery is made, this all-encompassing, all-destroying and yet so easy science and rational wisdom, namely, that all is one, there is no need of further search and inquiry; everything that others know or believe in through other means is only error, deception or incapacity of reason just as all change and all life is an empty appearance."¹⁴⁰ It is not hard to see that with this critique Schlegel was targeting Kant's declaration that reason, when it searches for answers to questions of God, freedom, or Being, brings itself into so-called antinomies of reason, and Schlegel's book was also understood as a critique of Enlightenment philosophy. The severity of the reaction to the book may be assessed from Goethe's comment to Reinhard that he could see "the wretched devil and his grandmother with all his eternal stinking retinue painted black into the book." Indeed, Goethe claimed he could actually detect the "church which alone can ensure salvation [die allein seeligmachende Kirche]" in Schlegel's work.¹⁴¹

It is in the context of this debate that the German argument about the original Gītā now needs to be located. As the recognized experts on Indian texts by the late nineteenth/early twentieth century, Indologists were uniquely well placed to respond to Schlegel's views. Almost a century of professionalization of the discipline had left all authority over Indian texts consolidated in their hands and they were not averse to using this authority in defense of the establishment's view. Schlegel's interpretation was especially vulnerable on philological grounds. The Indologists, most of whom benefited from a better knowledge of Sanskrit, could provide expert testimony on the Bhagavadgītā. Even if they did not engage with Schlegel explicitly, every new reconstruction purporting to show pantheism was a later corruption implicitly undercut his argument. Further, by activating their new method of historical-critical research, they could show that it was Catholicism not Protestantism that represented a danger to Germany. Lassen, Holtzmann Sr., and Holtzmann Jr. had each argued a version of the theory. Irrespective of whether they titled their protagonists Aryans (Lassen), Germanic tribes (Holtzmann Sr.), or Indo-Germans (Holtzmann Jr.), the story they told was essentially the same each time: priests running amok were a threat to the state and/or the German people.

As we have seen, the central figure in this Protestant nationalist revival was Adolf Holtzmann Jr. However, his wild excesses and lust for barbarity made him unsuitable as a spokesperson for Protestantism. He had put in place the essential elements of the anti-Catholic rhetoric, but he had misjudged the political brisance of declaring the Germanic people to have been pantheistic. As an irrationalist, Holtzmann wished to turn Protestantism away from its Enlightenment heritage back toward a primitive Indo-Germanism. Garbe correctly detected the political risks of the Holtzmannian project and entered the debate to defend the ancient Germanic peoples as the epitome of rational, monotheistic faith. By attacking Holtzmann, he shifted the balance of the debate back to a critique of Schlegel's view of the Protestant Reformation as leading to pantheism. In his description of the original Kṛṣṇa cult, Garbe deliberately

140. Schlegel, *Die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier*, 243.

141. Cited in Struc-Oppenberg, "Einleitung," ccxxvii.

struck a Christian note. It was true, as Holtzmann (and all Germans since Luther) had suspected, that priests were responsible for the corruption of religion. But that corruption led to pantheism rather than theism. There could be no risk of the turn to Germanism leading to pantheism, Garbe was able to assure the establishment. On the contrary, the Germanic religion was “*by nature . . . an ethical Kṣatriya religion*.”¹⁴²

By entering the “original Gītā” debate at the turn of the century, Garbe was able to restore the pantheism controversy once again to its original form: was it Protestantism or Catholicism that led to pantheism? Holtzmann’s tolerance of pantheism and his view that the dangers of Catholicism were to be sought rather in its imposition of theistic ideas upon the Germanic peoples was shown to be a minority view. Garbe pruned back Holtzmann’s Romantic excesses and once again rendered the Bhagavadgītā safe for the German public. As long as they read it in his sanitized edition, readers of the poem were at no risk of developing pantheistic sympathies. And as long as they remembered that it was ancient India and not contemporary India that was the model and objective, there was no danger of Indology inculcating politically seditious views in them. The Bhagavadgītā was set for its meteoric rise in Indology.

Turning back to Garbe’s Gītā interpretation, we can now see why Garbe interpreted the Bhagavadgītā as he did. The Indian poem was to be shown to be consonant with Protestant values. Garbe argued that the Bhagavadgītā espoused a rational monotheistic religion eschewing both ceremonialism and good works. The poem’s ethics were based on an ideal of selfless duty; salvation, in the original Gītā, consisted not in extinction or merger of the self into pantheistic Brahman, but in the continued, eternal, and eternally self-conscious existence of souls. It was only later, with the rise of the priesthood, that pantheistic doctrines infiltrated the text. Though Garbe was clearly reinterpreting the Gītā along Christian lines, his idea of Christianity was specifically a Protestant one. It was an austere religion based on the promise of eternal salvation, eternal self-consciousness, and a rejection of a philosophical “quietism.”

Though his ideas of the historical and heroic origins of the epic were not original, Garbe played a key role in establishing a state-supported, dogmatically orthodox Indology. He added a further layer to the existing German mythology of the epic and made this mythology productive for German apologetic purposes. Garbe essentially accepted and canonized Holtzmann’s ideas (except for the charge of ancient pantheism). But by adding his ideas of the euhemeristic rise of Kṛṣṇa to a god, he created a further layer in support of German ideas of epic. Further, by offering a pseudoscientific thesis of how “Kṛṣṇaism” had originated as an ethical warrior religion, he endowed Holtzmann’s anti-Brahmanism with an air of scientific legitimacy. Nowhere would his commitment to Protestant orthodoxy be more evident than in his ideas of “Bhāgavata religion.”

IDEAS OF BHĀGAVATA RELIGION

As the senior scholar of the history of Indian religions after Roth’s death in 1895, Garbe was a respected voice on ancient Indian religions. At the time of his Gītā translation, he

142. Garbe, *Die Bhagavadgītā*, 32 (Garbe’s emphasis).

had already published an edition of the Vaitāna Śrautasūtra,¹⁴³ a three-volume edition of the Āpastamba Śrautasūtra,¹⁴⁴ two volumes on the philosophy of Sāṃkhya,¹⁴⁵ and the introductory *The Philosophy of Ancient India* and *Beiträge zur indischen Kulturgeschichte* (the former being a collection of three papers published in *The Monist* between 1892 and 1893).¹⁴⁶ Garbe had also published (in 1894) the highly polemical *roman à clef* titled *The Redemption of the Brahman*, in which he made clear his low opinion of Brahmins, whom he portrayed as corrupt, superstitious, intolerant, illiberal, and inhumane.¹⁴⁷ Garbe was thus considered an expert on Indian religions and his pronouncements on the Bhagavadgītā carried weight, the more so as he specifically took up questions of the religious outlook of the text.¹⁴⁸

In his reconstruction of the original Gītā, Garbe not only attempted to address questions of the poem's genesis and growth but also attempted to offer the reader a kind of synopsis of Indian religious views. In his introduction to the poem, he ascribed the "philosophical foundation" of the "Bhāgavata religion" to a "truly Indian tendency to fuse religion and philosophy."¹⁴⁹ It is not clear what Garbe meant by "truly Indian" or whether we are to take the statement positively or negatively. It is possible that "truly" here meant "old" or "intrinsic," since he also attributed the philosophical enrichment of Bhāgavata religion to "the strong speculative character of the Kṣatriya caste."¹⁵⁰ In any case, Garbe argued that at a certain stage "an interest in philosophical questions seized wide sections of the population in ancient India" and that, in order to satisfy this longing for philosophical answers, the Bhagavadgītā turned to "the two oldest systems that India had produced, Sāṃkhya and Yoga."¹⁵¹ According to Garbe, this turn to the older philosophical traditions was necessitated

143. Richard Garbe, *Vaitāna Śrautasūtra: Das Ritual des Atharvaveda* (Strassburg: K. J. Trübner, 1878).

144. Richard Garbe, *The Śrauta Sūtra of Āpastamba, belonging to the Taittirīya Samhitā with the Commentary of Rudradatta*, vols. 1–3 (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1882–1902).

145. Richard Garbe, *Die Sāṃkhya-Philosophie: Eine Darstellung des indischen Rationalismus nach den Quellen* (Leipzig: H. Haessel, 1894) and *Sāṃkhya und Yoga* (Strassburg: K. J. Trübner, 1896).

146. Richard Garbe, *The Philosophy of Ancient India* (Chicago: Open Court, 1899) and *Beiträge zur indischen Kulturgeschichte* (Berlin: Gebrüder Paetel, 1903).

147. Richard Garbe, *The Redemption of the Brahman* (Chicago: Open Court, 1894). The original of this work had appeared two years earlier under the title of "Die Erlösung des Brahmanen. Eine Erzählung von Richard Garbe" in the *Illustrierte Deutsche Monatshefte* (1892): 201–31. For a discussion, see Kaushik Bagchi, "An Orientalist in the Orient: Richard Garbe's Indian Journey, 1885–1886," *Journal of World History* 14, no. 3 (2003): 281–325 and also see Vishwa Adluri and Joydeep Bagchee, "The Redemption of the Scientist: Richard Garbe as a Chronicler of India," in *Transcultural Encounters between Germany and India: Kindred Spirits in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, ed. Joanne Miyang Cho, Eric Kurlander, and Douglas T. McGetchin (New York: Routledge, 2013), 68–83.

148. Garbe's place in the history of the Tübingen chair is discussed in Junginger, *Von der philologischen zur völkischen Religionswissenschaft*, 33–47 and also see the bibliography of his writings on pp. 335–37.

149. Garbe, *Die Bhagavadgītā*, 37.

150. Ibid.

151. Garbe, *Die Bhagavadgītā*, 37–38.

by the fact that “brahmanic pantheism or Brahmanism, the doctrine of Brahman or the All-One... was not consonant with the monotheism of the Bhāgavatas.” As a result, the Bhāgavata sect, seeking to satisfy the longing for philosophical answers that had erupted in India, was forced to turn its “gaze” to “the two philosophical systems, which arose ‘in the freer atmosphere of the less brahmanized *foreign country*’... Sāṃkhya and Yoga.” These systems according to Garbe were exoteric to “the so-called *middle country* (*madhyadeśa*, the region around and north of Delhi)... the homeland of brahmanic culture and power,” the seat of Brahmanic pantheism no less than of Bhāgavata religion.¹⁵² Through this marriage of convenience the Bhāgavatas were able to enter the Indian mainstream.

Garbe proposed the following dates for the Bhāgavata religion: “*In the first period*... from indeterminate beginnings to 300 BC,” the Bhāgavata led “a special existence outside of Brahmanism.” According to Garbe, “all the religion historical processes discussed in this chapter [i.e., in his Gītā introduction]... the foundation of a popular monotheism by Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva, its philosophical embellishment with Sāṃkhya-Yoga, the divinization of the founder [of the religion], and... the deepening of the religious sentiment through the demands of *bhakti*” were to be found in this period.¹⁵³ “*The second period* was characterized by the Brahmanization of the Bhāgavata religion and the identification of Kṛṣṇa with Viṣṇu.”¹⁵⁴ Garbe declared: “the popularity of the sagas and legends woven around Kṛṣṇa must have stimulated the interest of the Brahmins, but a foundation for the identification of Kṛṣṇa with Viṣṇu only became available once Kṛṣṇa was finally elevated from a tribal hero to a god.” He resolutely combated the suggestion that this identification could have taken place right away, that is, in a single step from folk hero to identification with the Brahmanic Viṣṇu rather than via the intermediate step of elevation from folk hero to a god. Instead he argued that, in the case of “the popular figure of the powerful and energetic Kṛṣṇa,” it was not so easy for the Brahmins to “assimilate” him to their god Viṣṇu. “The Brahmins knew quite well from the ancient lore that he had rejected the authority of the Vedas in his doctrines and had fought against the Brahmanic sacrificial system, the great source of income of the priesthood....”¹⁵⁵ And yet, for this very reason, as he progressively became more of a threat to Brahmanic tradition, it was essential to assimilate Kṛṣṇa into their religion. Garbe wrote:

How then can we doubt that the Brahmins reluctantly, but with an eye to their own advantage, drew the Bhāgavatas to their side in order to combat Buddhism more successfully? Could they have done this with apparent justification more likely once Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva had become a character among the Bhāgavatas that demonstrated an inner kinship to the Brahmanic Viṣṇu [or prior to this, when he was but a folk hero]?¹⁵⁶

152. Ibid., 38 (all emphasis Garbe’s).

153. Ibid., 45–46 (Garbe’s emphasis).

154. Ibid., 46 (Garbe’s emphasis).

155. Ibid.

156. Ibid., 46–47.

As Garbe imagined the process of Brahmanic assimilation, the priests incorporated the semidivinized aspects of the folk hero Kṛṣṇa into their pantheistic god Viṣṇu. When it came to aspects not so easily assimilable to their god (e.g., Kṛṣṇa's "humanity and warrior nature [Kriegertum] as it lived on in the epic sagas"), they invoked "their convenient Avatāra theory."¹⁵⁷ Though originally a Kṣatriya and a man, Kṛṣṇa could now be declared to be the offspring or incarnation of the Brahmanic god. Garbe placed this second period of the Bhāgavata religion "from 300 BC until the beginning of our calendar [i.e., 1 AD]" and declared that, "at any rate, the original Bhagavadgītā belongs in this period, because in it [i.e., in the original Gītā] Kṛṣṇa is not as yet identified with Brahman but repeatedly referred to as Viṣṇu..."¹⁵⁸ He placed "the third period of the Bhāgavata religion" in the period from "the beginning of our calendar [1 AD] to the middle of the 11th century AD," a time that, he argued, was "characterized by the identification of Kṛṣṇa-Viṣṇu with Brahman.... The revision of the Bhagavadgītā was undertaken in the early stages of this period."¹⁵⁹ Finally, he also argued for a "fourth period," a period that saw the "systematization [of the Bhagavadgītā] by Rāmānuja in the 11th century."¹⁶⁰ We also find somewhere between the third and the fourth period the emergence of an "erotic understanding of Kṛṣṇa." Garbe argued that alongside the "pantheistic understanding of god, which was implemented ever more systematically," this was the second trait that characterized the Indianization (Brahmanization?) of the original Kṣatriya folk hero. "Quite in keeping with the metaphysical-sensuous double-nature of the Indian," this understanding consisted mainly in a "description of his love games with the female cowherds" but it also "simultaneously exhibit[ed] a mystical element."¹⁶¹ Concluding, he declared that Bhagavadgītā's "significance for the history of religion" lay precisely in the fact that it was "not a priestly product."¹⁶² As a work in which "the Veda and Brahmanic ritual are rejected and the cunning greed of the Brahmins is castigated,"¹⁶³ he argued that the Bhagavadgītā could offer a glimpse into "the original non-Vedānticized" worldview of the Indians.¹⁶⁴

In a second article published in 1909 in James Hasting's *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* Garbe further expanded on these views.¹⁶⁵ He also expanded the polemical scope of his work by focusing on a deconstruction of Kṛṣṇa's claims to divinity. Advocating a theory of the "historical development of Kṛṣṇa," Garbe claimed that Kṛṣṇa in the Mahābhārata appeared "at one time as a human hero, at another as

157. Ibid., 47.

158. Ibid., 48.

159. Ibid. (Garbe's emphasis).

160. Ibid., 49 (Garbe's emphasis).

161. Ibid., 48.

162. Ibid., 51 (Garbe's emphasis).

163. Ibid.

164. Ibid., 52 (Garbe's emphasis).

165. Richard Garbe, "Bhagavad-Gītā," in *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1909), 535–38.

semi-divine (a phenomenal form of Viṣṇu), or again as the one only [*sic*] God, . . . who finally is identified with Brahman, the All-Soul.”¹⁶⁶ From this, he concluded that

it may be assumed as probable that Kṛṣṇa was originally the leader of a warrior and pastoral tribe of non-Brāhman race, and that he lived long before the Buddha. He became the eponymous hero of his people, not only because of his prowess in war, but also probably because he was the founder of the religion of his race—a religion independent of the Vedic tradition and monotheistic, in which a special stress was laid on *ethical* requirements. The adherents of this religion were called “Bhāgavatas,” adopting other names later on. As the form of Kṛṣṇa within the race to which he belonged was advanced from the position of a demi-god to that of a god (identified especially with the god of the Bhāgavatas), Brāhmanism claimed as its own this popular and powerful representation of the Deity, and transformed it into an incarnation of Viṣṇu.¹⁶⁷

In contrast to Holtzmann, who had identified the earliest stage of the Bhagavadgītā with Indo-Germanic culture, Garbe was more interested in the second stage of this development, which he represented as a vigorous grassroots theism with pronounced ethical and pietistic contours. According to him, identifying the hero Kṛṣṇa with their god was a way for “Brāhmanism” to “gai[n] over [*sic*] the entire religious community of the Bhāgavatas, and the latter (a still existing sect . . .) were merged in Brāhmanism.”¹⁶⁸ The Bhagavadgītā, though “originally a text-book of this sect,” thereafter gained “a position of such significance for the whole of Brāhman India that in recent years educated Hindus [were able to] . . . put it forward as a rival to the New Testament.”¹⁶⁹

As a Protestant, Garbe could hardly permit the comparison to stand. Thus he argued that “it has long been known that we do not possess the Bhagavad-Gītā in its original form, but in a form which is the result of essential modifications. The doctrines, which are here put into the mouth of Kṛṣṇa, present a remarkable combination of pantheistic and monotheistic ideas, of philosophical thoughts, and of pure and deeply religious faith in God.”¹⁷⁰ Further, he activated a form of Schlegel’s theory that Indian thought, though containing traces of the original revelation, had undergone a progressive degeneration. As he described the Gītā,

A personal God, Kṛṣṇa, manifests himself in the form of a human hero, propounds his doctrines, and demands of his hearer not only the exact fulfilment of duty, but before everything else faith and love and resignation [renunciation?], of which he is himself to be the object. By a special act of grace he then reveals himself in his superhuman but still bodily form, and promises to the faithful, as reward for his love to [*sic*] God, admission after death to His presence, and the prize of fellowship with Him.¹⁷¹

166. Ibid., 535.

167. Ibid. (Garbe’s italics).

168. Ibid., 535–36.

169. Ibid., 536.

170. Ibid.

171. Ibid.

But whereas Schlegel attributed this degeneration to rationalistic currents reminiscent of Protestantism, Garbe blamed it upon Brahmanism. According to him, the introduction of “the supreme first principle the neuter *impersonal* Brahman, the Absolute” alongside a “deity” who was “conceived in as *personal* a manner as possible” and who “dominate[d] the entire [old] poem,” was responsible for the rise of idealistic and pantheistic doctrines.¹⁷² He expressed the contrast between the rational and monotheistic doctrines and these later additions as follows: “At one time Kṛṣṇa says of himself that he is the one sole supreme God, the creator and ruler of the universe and of all things therein; at another he sets forth the Vedāntic doctrine of the Brahman and of *māyā*, the cosmical illusion, and proclaims that the supreme end of man is to transcend this cosmical illusion and become one with Brahman.” More or less paraphrasing the views of his 1905 text, he argued that “these two doctrines, the theistic and the pantheistic, are interwoven with one another, sometimes following one another more closely and without a break, sometimes more loosely connected.” “Yet the one is not announced as the lower exoteric doctrine, and the other as the higher exoteric; nor is it in any way preliminary to knowledge, or a type of the truth, and the pantheism of the Vedānta the truth itself. . . . the two forms of belief are throughout treated entirely as though there were no distinction at all between them, whether as regards contents or value.”¹⁷³

Garbe also resolutely contested the view of the Bhagavadgītā as a uniform text. He noted that though “the attempt has been made to explain away the contradictions of the Bhagavad-Gītā, on the theory that no definite system is here intended; that the whole is the work of a poet, who gives utterance and shape to his thoughts as they occur to him, without heeding the anomalies which are involved in detail,” “the fundamental contradiction which permeates the Bhagavad-Gītā cannot be set aside by an appeal to its poetical character.” “It can be explained only on the hypothesis that one or other [*sic*] of the heterogenous doctrines propounded by Kṛṣṇa must be a later addition.” He cited Holtzmann’s views of the Gītā as “originally a poem of a purely pantheistic nature, which was later modified and adapted in the interests of the Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa cult,” but declared that “his theory also, however, is mistaken; precisely the reverse seems to be the fact.” In place of the Holtzmannian hypothesis, he repeated his conviction that, “the entire character of the poem in design and execution is so overwhelmingly theistic, that we must suppose it to have been from the very beginning of a purely theistic character, and to have been adapted later in a pantheistic sense from the standpoint of the Vedānta philosophy.”¹⁷⁴ He argued that the “real facts” of the Bhagavadgītā were that “in the ancient poem a *Kṛṣṇaism* based upon the *Sāṅkhya-Yoga* philosophy is set forth; in the additions of the recension the *Vedānta* philosophy is taught,” and, based on these facts, justified his attempt in his

172. Ibid. (all italics Garbe’s).

173. Ibid.

174. Ibid.

1905 edition “to determine the original form of the poem, and to separate the additions of the Vedāntic recension.”¹⁷⁵

It is not necessary here to trace the remainder of Garbe’s views. They are, in any case, essentially the same as those expressed in his 1905 text. It was more important for our purposes to show how the reconstruction undertaken in that text, though allegedly scientific being based on a disinterested contemplation of the text, could be activated to make polemical points about Indian religions. Garbe’s thesis of the so-called Bhāgavata religion was in fact a way of buttressing Christian ideas of salvation and faith, as his analysis of the “*practical part*” of the Bhagavadgītā’s doctrines especially shows. According to him, in the Bhagavadgītā,

two ways of salvation are contrasted with one another, one of which consists in withdrawal from the life of the world, and seeking after knowledge, the other in acts conformable to duty and free from desire. Although the second way is repeatedly described as superior (iii. 8, v. 2, xviii. 7), and, to judge from the whole tenor, is to be regarded as the true ethical ideal of the poem, the author has nevertheless not ventured to reject the way of salvation by renunciation of the world, and abstract knowledge. The conception that deliverance from the cycle of existence was to be won by meditation in complete isolation from the world, had been for centuries so deeply rooted in all thoughtful circles among the Indian peoples that it could no longer be seriously assailed. No course remained open but to concede a place to the two ways side by side with each other, and to teach that both right action and the knowledge which implies non-action or abstinence from works lead to salvation. From the fact that in the Gītā now one and now the other standpoint is adopted, and at times the ideal of quietism is placed unreservedly above that of activity (vi. 3), all sorts of inconsistencies and ambiguities have arisen, which a decided rejection of the quietistic standpoint would have avoided.¹⁷⁶

The Bhagavadgītā does not pose these two approaches as contradictory, or, indeed, as alternatives, the practice of knowledge being conducive to the practice of action and vice versa, but from Garbe’s Christian, Protestant perspective it was important to emphasize that only one could be “the true ethical ideal of the poem.” As with the pantheism controversy, a problem internal to Christian faith was used to radically simplify the Bhagavadgītā’s complex philosophical project. Historical reconstruction in this case became a convenient tool for deflecting the philosophical and epistemological challenge to Protestant ideas of salvation. Especially in light of Luther’s rejection of the *theologia gloriae* of the ancients, the concept of *jñāna yoga* represented a major challenge to Garbe and other Indologists.¹⁷⁷ Its explosive potential could only be defused by insisting that it was not part of the original “revelation” of the Gītā;

175. Ibid. (Garbe’s italics).

176. Ibid., 537.

177. The main source texts for Luther’s understanding of the term are the “Disputation against Scholastic Theology” (1517) and the “Heidelberg Disputation” (1518). For a discussion, see Jos. E. Vercruyse, “Luther’s Theology of the Cross at the Time of the Heidelberg

a corruption introduced into the Bhāgavata religion no less than the introduction of Neoplatonic and Aristotelian ontology into Christianity represented a corruption of the latter. It was also important to Garbe to reject the law and the concept of good works. He claimed that the “view of the Bhagavad-Gītā” was that “saving knowledge is not limited to the discrimination of soul and matter”; “this discrimination” was but “a condition preliminary . . . to the *knowledge of God*.”¹⁷⁸ In his opinion, it was this latter knowledge “that first really opens the way to the highest salvation.”¹⁷⁹ Garbe thus advocated a strongly theistic reading of the Bhagavadgītā, whose central precepts were:

1. “The rejection of the Vedic conception of the merit of works” (a view that he argued was “expressed in the original Gītā without any limitation”).¹⁸⁰
2. That “all the ceremonies of the Brāhmanical ritual minister, indeed, throughout to individual desires, and therefore stand in sharp contrast to the ethical ideal of the Gītā.”¹⁸¹
3. “Indifference toward the prescriptions of the Vedic ritual is therefore also a preliminary condition for the attainment of salvation.”¹⁸² “‘Abandon all sacred rites,’ it is said in xviii. 66; and similarly, in ii. 42–45, unconcealed contempt is expressed for the promises of the Veda, which take account only of the material world and offer only transitory reward (cf. also ix. 20, 21).”¹⁸³

Summing up, he noted:

We now come, finally, to the most important demand which the Gītā makes upon those men who stand in need of deliverance. As is well known, the poem is the anthem in praise of *bhakti*, or believing and trustful love to [*sic*] God. With unerring certainty love to [*sic*] God leads to the goal alike by the way of knowledge and by that of unselfish performance of duty. The entire poem is full of this thought, and it was composed with a view to its exposition. From love to [*sic*] God knowledge of God arises (xviii. 55), and in consequence the believer refers all his deeds to God and leaves their results to Him.¹⁸⁴

Garbe’s translation of the Indian *bhakti* (to worship, to adore) with “believing and trustful love” was characteristic of his highly Christianizing interpretation. A few lines later he also spoke of the “believer” (for *bhakta*?). As with Holtzmann, who expressed suspicion of salvation through good works, he placed faith in opposition

Disputation,” *Gregorianum* 57, no. 3 (1976): 523–48 and “‘*Theologia crucis*’—‘*Theologia gloriae*’ bei Martin Luther: Eine terminologische Untersuchung,” *Luther-Bulletin* 10 (2001): 27–40.

178. Garbe, “Bhagavad-Gītā,” 537 (Garbe’s italics).

179. *Ibid.*

180. *Ibid.*

181. *Ibid.*

182. *Ibid.*, 537–38.

183. *Ibid.*, 537.

184. *Ibid.*, 538.

with knowledge and with good works. He insisted that the Bhagavadgītā advocated the abandonment of sacred rites and placed no trust in the merit of works.¹⁸⁵ This view, however, was at odds not only with the text (thus necessitating a pseudocritical reconstruction to excise those parts of the text not consonant with his theory) but also with the Indian commentarial tradition (which he did not cite). Śaṅkara, for instance, in his commentary on the Bhagavadgītā, argues that the “dharma, characterized by action and enjoined for different castes and stages of life, even though it is meant for achieving prosperity and attaining heaven, etc., yet, when performed with the attitude of dedication to God and without hankering for (selfish) results leads to the purification of the internal organ.” Indeed, he notes that “in the case of a person with a purified internal organ it [i.e., action] becomes the cause even of final Liberation, by becoming the means for the attainment of fitness for steady adherence to Knowledge (*jñānaniṣṭhā*) and the rise of Knowledge.”¹⁸⁶ Śaṅkara’s comments are important insofar as he was a critic of the ritual portion of the Veda (the *karmakāṇḍa*) and yet he considered action a necessary prerequisite for salvation. His commentary on the Bhagavadgītā makes it amply clear that, in the Indian tradition, *bhakti* (irrespective of whether we translate it as “belief” or as “devotion”) functions in the context of social and ritual aspects of religion (performed for the sake of *cittaśuddhi*). Further, *bhakti* does not represent a genuflection out of faith alone before a deity characterised as absolutely other, but has to be accompanied by active striving for knowledge. In contrast, Garbe’s Christianizing interpretation dissolved the triadic relationship of *bhakti*, *jñāna*, and *karma*. Even though he argued that “with unerring certainty love to [*sic*] God leads to the goal alike by the way of knowledge and by that of unselfish performance of duty,” he transferred the salvific moment from the latter two to the former.¹⁸⁷ For him, only the latter was ultimately efficacious in ensuring

185. Ibid., 537–38.

186. Swāmi Gambhīrānanda, trans., *Bhagavad Gītā: With the Commentary of Śaṅkarācārya* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2006), 6–7.

187. The insistence upon the exclusivity of faith as a means to salvation is problematic even within the Christian tradition. As the historian Philip Schaff notes, “The most important example of dogmatic influence in Luther’s version is the famous interpolation of the word *alone* in Rom. 3:28 (*allein durch den Glauben*), by which he intended to emphasize his solifidian doctrine of justification, on the plea that the German idiom required the insertion for the sake of clearness. But he thereby brought Paul into direct *verbal* conflict with James, who says (James 2:24), ‘by works a man is justified, and *not only* by faith’ (*nicht durch den Glauben allein*). This verse from the book of James does not conflict with Paul’s letter to the Romans. Sola Fide as in Romans talks about faith at the point of accepting Jesus as Lord, while James talks about works as defined by faith in other words, works that flow from Christians as a result of this faith. It is well known that Luther deemed it impossible to harmonize the two apostles in this article, and characterized the Epistle of James as an ‘epistle of straw,’ because it had no evangelical character (*keine evangelische Art*). He therefore insisted on this insertion in spite of all outcry against it. His defense is very characteristic. ‘If your papist,’ he says, ‘makes much useless fuss about the word *sola*, *allein*, tell him at once: Doctor Martin Luther will have it so, and says: Papist and donkey are one thing; *sic volo*, *sic jubeo*, *sit pro ratione voluntas*. For we do not want to be pupils and followers of the Papists, but their masters and judges.’ Then he goes on in the style of

salvation. It would take a Catholic scholar, the Bonn Indologist Hermann Jacobi, to shift the argument for the original Gītā back to pantheism.

THE EPIC GĪTĀ OF HERMANN JACOBI

Born in Kiel to Friedrich Heinrich Otto, owner of a steam mill and mill constructor, Hermann Jacobi (1850–1937) was a member of Germany's privileged *Bildungsbürgertum* (the educated middle class) which had benefited most from the educational reforms of Wilhelmine Germany. Jacobi studied mathematics, Sanskrit, and comparative linguistics between 1868 and 1872 in Berlin and Bonn. A student of Albrecht Weber's and Johannes Gildemeister's, he completed a *Habilitation* (post-doctoral dissertation) in Sanskrit and comparative linguistics in Bonn. Following initial appointments at Münster (1876) and Kiel (1885), he received the prestigious chair at the University of Bonn in 1889, albeit not without political machination on his part.¹⁸⁸ Jacobi remained at Bonn till the end of his life, becoming professor emeritus in 1922. He died in 1937.¹⁸⁹ Unusually among the Indologists, Jacobi was Catholic, a fact that also made itself felt in his interpretation of the Gītā.

Jacobi's response to the "original Gītā" debate came in two parts: the first was an article on the Bhagavadgītā in the *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* in 1918¹⁹⁰; the second a review of Garbe's translation and reconstruction of the Bhagavadgītā (1st ed. 1905; 2nd rev. ed. 1921) in the *Deutsche Literaturzeitung* in 1921. The latter led to an acrimonious response from Garbe and a series of articles by the two followed between 1921 and 1922.¹⁹¹ In this section, we first look

foolish boasting against the Papists, imitating the language of St. Paul in dealing with his Judaizing opponents (2 Cor. 11:22 sqq.): 'Are they doctors? so am I. Are they learned? so am I. Are they preachers? so am I. Are they theologians? so am I. Are they disputators? so am I. Are they philosophers? so am I. Are they the writers of books? so am I. And I shall further boast: I can expound Psalms and Prophets; which they can not. I can translate; which they can not. ... Therefore the word *allein* shall remain in my New Testament, and though all pope-donkeys (*Papstesel*) should get furious and foolish, they shall not turn it out.' Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 6; *Modern Christianity: The German Reformation* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901), 361–63.

188. See Indra Sengupta, "State, University, and Indology," 295–96. Jacobi, second-favorite for the chair of Indology in Bonn, convinced *Kultusminister* Althoff to appoint him to the prestigious chair in return for ensuring that Oldenberg received his former position in Kiel.

189. The biographical information in this section is taken from Bernhard Kölver, "Jacobi, Hermann," in *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, vol. 10 (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1974), 228–29.

190. Jacobi, "Über die Einfügung der Bhagavadgītā im Mahābhārata," 323–27.

191. The debate was triggered by Jacobi's review of the second revised edition of Garbe's 1905 translation of the Bhagavad Gītā, published in the *Deutsche Literaturzeitung* in December 1921 (Hermann Jacobi, "Die Bhagavadgītā," review of *Die Bhagavadgītā*, by Richard Garbe, *Deutsche Literaturzeitung* 42, no. 50/51 [1921]: 715–24). In February 1922, Garbe responded in the pages of the same magazine with a sharp rejection of Jacobi's criticisms (Richard Garbe, "Noch einmal das Bhagavadgītā-Problem," *Deutsche*

at his reconstruction of the original Gītā before focusing in the next on his debate with Garbe over the Gītā's pantheism.

Jacobi's 1918 article did not cite any secondary literature, but the influence of Holtzmann on this essay is palpable. In the main, Jacobi set out from a distinction between an original epic and later didactic accretions, an approach by now familiar to us from the work of Lassen and Holtzmann. Lassen had not addressed the Bhagavadgītā directly, but Holtzmann in 1893 had already opined that there was something "disconcerting"¹⁹² about the philosophical dialogue that follows on the opening of the battle. His proposed solution to this difficulty, we may recall, was that originally, the Bhagavadgītā only contained a brief meditation on the "senselessness of fearing death."¹⁹³ Thereafter, he suggested, the Germanic warriors, their mettle sharpened, would have rejoined battle. Holtzmann also advocated that the second chapter in particular, "with its simple style, [and] powerful and clear language," would have been the kernel of this message.¹⁹⁴ Although he was unclear on whether the Gītā ended here or with chapter 3, he clearly imagined a brief battlefield encumbrance as the original Gītā.

Following in Holtzmann's wake, Jacobi too argued for a shorter poem. Calling the Bhagavadgītā "the textbook of the Bhāgavatas" (a title already applied to the poem by Garbe, although Jacobi did not cite him), he argued that the poem was "closely connected with the genuine epic insofar as it contains the religious [and] philosophical teachings which Kṛṣṇa conveys to Arjuna before the two armies at the outbreak of the great war."¹⁹⁵ "And yet," he argued, "there can be no doubt that the philosophical poem does not belong to the *original epic*."¹⁹⁶ His reasoning was as follows:

What epic poet would completely neglect to take into consideration the epic situation described by him in order to place a philosophical conversation spanning over six hundred and fifty verses in the mouths of two of his heroes at a moment when the opposed armies are about to begin their attack.¹⁹⁷

Jacobi's ideas of "epic poet" or "epic situation" were clearly influenced by the work of Lassen and Holtzmann. Like them, he believed that the Mahābhārata would have been centered around epic heroes and that the epic's theosophic reflections were later additions. He argued that "the question [for scholarship] can only be what belongs

Literaturzeitung 43, no. 6 [1922]: 97–104). Two months later, Jacobi responded to Garbe's response (Hermann Jacobi, "Weiteres zum Bhagavadgītā-Problem," *Deutsche Literaturzeitung* 43, no. 14 [1922]: 265–73), and, in July 1922, Garbe finally closed the book on the debate with his "Mein Schlußwort zum Bhagavadgītā-Problem" ("My Last Word on the Bhagavadgītā-Problem"; *Deutsche Literaturzeitung* 43, no. 28 [1922]: 604–5).

192. Holtzmann Jr., *Die neunzehn Bücher*, 154.

193. *Ibid.*, 164.

194. *Ibid.*

195. Jacobi, "Über die Einfügung," 323.

196. *Ibid.* (Jacobi's emphasis).

197. *Ibid.*

to the *real* epic and how the *didactic* text is connected with it.”¹⁹⁸ Jacobi asserted that “the latter was not inserted [into the original epic] as an independent text, but most likely composed or revised keeping in view the context in which it now appears.” Like Holtzmann, he was inclined to see the first chapter, which “describes the situation at the beginning of the conflict,” as “belong[ing] undoubtedly to the genuine epic.”¹⁹⁹

But in contrast to Holtzmann, who had suggested that the additions to the *Gītā* began from the fourth chapter onward,²⁰⁰ Jacobi favored an even shorter (and even more “epic”) *Gītā*. According to him, the “insertion must be sought in the second chapter.”²⁰¹ This chapter, he implied, held the key to understanding how the expansion of the original epic poem into a didactic, philosophic work might have taken place. First, he argued that, following the first chapter in which Arjuna expresses despair at having to kill his relatives, in chapter 2 “Kṛṣṇa speaks to Arjuna to pluck up his courage.” “Arjuna repeats in a forceful way the doubts already expressed in the first chapter (4–6). His decision is not to fight: *na yotsya iti Govindam uktvā tūṣṇīm babhūva ha* (9b).” Jacobi argued that the interpolations already began from this point onward. Of verses 7 and 8 he argued that “they were in contradiction to this decision [expressed in verse 9] inasmuch as in them Arjuna requests Kṛṣṇa’s instruction and advice: *yac creyaḥ syān, niścitaṁ brūhi tan me; śiṣyas te ’haṁ śādhi māṁ tvāṁ pra-pannam* (7b).”²⁰² According to him, both verses had been interpolated into the text “manifestly” with the intent of “preparing [the ground] for the long philosophical instruction.”²⁰³

Concerning the further course of the poem, Jacobi recommended recurring to verse 2.2, which he argued offered a guideline for a reconstruction of the original. In his words:

He [i.e., Kṛṣṇa] had described Arjuna’s cowardice (*kaśmala*) in verse 2 as *anāryajuṣṭa*, *asvargya*, and *akīrtikara*. These three points appear in his speech, it is oriented according to them.²⁰⁴

Based on his intuition that chapter 2 would originally have been restricted to a discussion of these three points (which van Buitenen translates as “unseemly to the noble,” “not leading to heaven,” and “dishonorable”), Jacobi offered the following reconstruction of the original poem:

1. “*Asvargya* is dealt with in 31–33: the warriors gain heaven when they fulfill their duty to battle.”²⁰⁵

198. Ibid. (Jacobi’s emphasis).

199. Ibid.

200. Holtzmann Jr., *Die neunzehn Bücher*, 157.

201. Jacobi, “Einfügung,” 323.

202. Ibid.

203. Ibid., 324.

204. Ibid.

205. Ibid.

2. “[Verses] 34–36 elaborate on *akīrtikara*: everyone would criticize him, if he were not to fight.”²⁰⁶
3. “The first point *anāryajauṣṭa* must then relate to the first part of Kṛṣṇa’s discussions.”²⁰⁷ Jacobi translated this word as “recommended by the ignoble [Niedrigdenkenden]” and argued that such a thought “is expressed in the first verse of Kṛṣṇa’s speech [when he says]: *aśocyān anvaśocas tvam prajñāvādāmś ca bhāṣase | gatāsūn agatāsūmś ca nā ‘nuśocanti paṇḍitāḥ |*.”²⁰⁸

Jacobi thus advocated a radically pared second chapter built up around verses 1–6 and 9 (introductory), 31–33 (dealing with the first of Kṛṣṇa’s reprimands), 34–36 (the second reprimand), and 11 (the third reprimand). Following verse 12 (he also included verse 12 as part of the continuation of the third reprimand though he did not explicitly clarify why he considered it to belong to the original Gītā), he excluded verses 13 to 17 on the grounds that “the following [text] as it now stands, reads like a description of the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, [and] not as an elaboration of the point referred, as it ought to.” He also claimed that “the length of this passage was suspicious,” since it encompassed “19 verses as compared to the 3 or 4 verses dedicated to the other two points.” “Three verses (19, 20, and 29) are evidently quotations from Kaṭha Up. 2, 19; 2, 18; 2, 7.”²⁰⁹ Thereafter, he argued, “verse 37 [already] brings the conclusion to Kṛṣṇa’s argument.” “The following verse,” he argued, “which prescribes indifference to success is in a certain sense contradictory to verse 37,” and he suggested that it had “manifestly” been inserted “in order to lead to the subject of practical philosophy (*yoga*) dealt with in 39ff., namely, the necessity of acting without interest in success.” “What was previously dealt with ought to belong to the speculative philosophy (*sāṅkhya*), but this applies only to the doctrine of the eternity and immutability of the soul!” “The interpolator disregarded this in order to be able to insert the didactic poem.”²¹⁰

Even though Jacobi’s reasons for excising specific passages were ad hoc, he argued his reconstruction succeeded in better restoring the poem’s contexture. In the actual poem, verses 7 and 8 are the crux of the dialogue, since they mark the point when Arjuna, realizing the futility and tragic nature of human action, turns to Kṛṣṇa, the immortal principle, for guidance. In verse 7, Arjuna states that his mind is overwhelmed by pity and he therefore finds himself unable to fight. Verse 7 looks forward to his conclusion in verse 9, where he declares he will not fight. Even though he appeals to Kṛṣṇa for advice in verse 7, this need not imply a contradiction with verse 9. In the dialogue that unfolds between the two protagonists, they go back and forth over the same ground many times with Kṛṣṇa constantly encouraging, censuring, or

206. Ibid.

207. Ibid.

208. Ibid. Jacobi does not translate the lines; van Buitenen’s translation reads: “You sorrow over men you should not be sorry for, and yet you speak to sage issues. The wise are not sorry for either the living or the dead.”

209. Ibid.

210. Ibid.

educating Arjuna. Likewise, in verse 8, Arjuna expresses his sense that nothing on earth will compensate him for the crime he is about to commit. Thereafter, following on this realization of war as a zero-sum game, in verse 9 he states his objection to fighting. Verses 7 to 9 thus clearly present a consistent train of thought. Jacobi, however, claimed that his reconstruction represented an improvement over the original. As justification, he advanced the following considerations:

If we only consider the verses essential to elaborate the ideas announced by Kṛṣṇa, which verses already reveal this [i.e., that they are essential] through their form or their relationship to the context of the passage, as being genuine, then the following train of thoughts results, as the reconstruction of the piece below shows. One sees that the inserted verses only introduce superfluous details concerning the nature of the immortal soul [into the text]. However, this was already assumed as known and it [i.e., the poem] is only concerned with the consequences of this assumption in Arjuna's case.²¹¹

Concluding his reconstruction, he argued:

1. "Kṛṣṇa's speech probably ends with verse 37 as the three points announced in verse 2 are exhausted."²¹²
2. "This was probably then followed by Arjuna's agreement, which now stands at the end of the poem (18, 73)."²¹³
3. "The description of the battle beginning with 6.43.6ff. then joined itself."²¹⁴

In all then, Jacobi's arguments yielded an epic *Gītā* of only 23 verses (in addition to the opening chapter 1). In addition to the verses we have already seen earlier (1–6, 9, 11–12, 31–33, 34–36, and 37), he also added verses 10, 18, 25–27, 30, and chapter 18, verse 73. This constituted the essential outline of the epic *Gītā* postulated by him, though he was modest enough to acknowledge that his reconstruction was only an "approximate reconstruction of the text so far as our material permits." He pointed out that "in the redaction of the *Bhagavadgītā*," "some verses could have been left out and others changed with regard to wording."²¹⁵

In the second half of the article, Jacobi then listed all the verses considered genuine by him, although he did not indicate changes of speaker between verses 1 and 3 and between verses 4 and 37. As verses 1–3 stand in his reconstruction, they are all spoken by an anonymous speaker, even though there is a change in perspective between verse 1 (spoken by Saṁjaya referring to Kṛṣṇa in the third person in the actual *Gītā*). More problematically, he also changed the epithet "Arjuna" in verse 2.2d to "Acyuta," even though the speaker is (or ought to be) Kṛṣṇa. To be sure, Arjuna is

211. Ibid.

212. Ibid.

213. Ibid., 324–25.

214. Ibid., 325.

215. Ibid.

also called occasionally called Acyuta in the Mahābhārata (for instance, at 1.218.39), but these are theologically loaded passages; in the Bhagavadgītā itself, Arjuna is never called Acyuta and the three times the name occurs it refers unambiguously to Kṛṣṇa (see Bhagavadgītā 1.21c, 11.42c, and 18.73c). It is possible that Jacobi, having eliminated most of the poem (and perhaps not even having bothered to read it from end to end), was unaware of these occurrences. Likewise, as verses 4–37 stand in his reconstruction, they are all spoken by Arjuna, including verse 10 which in the actual Gītā once again marks a shift of speaker to the narrator Saṁjaya.

Jacobi does not cite the edition he is relying upon, so it is nearly impossible to determine whether the error is in his source or was due to his own oversight. In any case, this carelessness combined with his jejune and self-referential arguments do not inspire much confidence in his abilities as a scholar and a critic. As a literary critic as well, he leaves much to be desired. For instance, concluding his survey of genuine, epic verses with the words “the epic text in which the didactic text of the Bhagavadgītā was inserted may have looked roughly like this,” he argued, “one cannot read the verses following verse 39 without sensing the great difference in tone and style of expression.” “One steps into a fairly dry didactic poem.” Jacobi admitted that in spite of all differences in style, the Bhagavadgītā was “so closely joined to the epic that it appears to have been composed or revised keeping in view the actual situation.” He argued that if one accepted the latter, then “one must assume that the original Bhagavadgītā already existed in the form of a dialogue between Vāsudeva and Arjuna at a time when they were not considered epic heroes but divine beings.” Further, he argued that “as the position of both names in the compound shows, Vāsudeva must have stood higher than Arjuna.” “Both must have had something in common, otherwise they would not appear in the epic so closely associated with each other. Perhaps it was the circumstance that Arjuna, too, is a *govinda*.”²¹⁶

As Jacobi imagined the process, there probably existed “an older poem which, for the purpose of its insertion in the epic, only required minor changes. In the course of this insertion, the opportunity for additions and deletions arose in order to bring the text into accord with the views of the redactors at the time.”²¹⁷ This poem, according to Jacobi, would have been religious in character, since it knew of Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa as “divine beings” rather than “epic heroes.” This religious poem, perhaps already in circulation among the Bhāgavatas, was then taken up and taken over by eponymous redactors of the epic, who adapted it to their purposes. Alternatively, writes Jacobi, “if one does not wish to make this assumption, then the redactors of the MBh. must themselves have composed the text of the Bhagavadgītā or, at least, have charged an eminent Bhāgavata with it [i.e., with its composition].”²¹⁸ In this case, the Bhagavadgītā would have been first composed for the Mahābhārata, either by the same eponymous redactors or someone commissioned by them. Irrespective of which of the two solutions we prefer, Jacobi argues that “in conclusion, it must be mentioned that the text of the Bhagavadgītā, after it was incorporated into the MBh.

216. Ibid., 326.

217. Ibid., 327.

218. Ibid.

cannot have undergone large additions; rather, deletions; for the number of verses is currently exactly 700 whereas according to 6.43.4 it must once have been 744. . . ”²¹⁹

It is not necessary here to dwell at length on Jacobi’s reconstruction, since our main purpose is to see how he responds to the pantheism controversy. Nonetheless, it is important to note the enormous complication this last section of his essay introduces into the “original Gītā” debate. In the first part of his article, Jacobi set out from a Holtzmannian perspective: he argued that the original Gītā would have been much shorter and referred to the “epic situation.” He considered it inconceivable that an “epic poet” would have inserted a philosophical poem of over 700 verses at such a crucial moment (i.e., when both armies are amassed for battle) and, like Holtzmann, he argued that the kernel of the poem must have lain in an encouragement to battle. He further saw this encouragement to lie in those parts of Kṛṣṇa’s speech addressing the three flaws of cowardice (it is “unseemly to the noble,” “does not lead to heaven,” and is “dishonorable”) and he reconstructed the entire poem around these three sections (adding only a brief introduction and a one-verse conclusion). It is clear that what Jacobi was, in effect, doing was reconstructing the original epic poem addressed to the heroic Indo-Germanic warriors, *exactly as this had been proposed by Holtzmann*. His epic Gītā essentially fulfilled the expectations placed on the old Indo-Germanic Gītā by Adolf Holtzmann.

And yet, following this reconstruction of the Holtzmannian original, we find a curious turn to a religious Gītā. In this poem, Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa are “divine beings” rather than “epic heroes.” Contrary to Holtzmann’s theory of a folk hero who was later divinized, Jacobi argues the inverse view: Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa are first “divine beings” and later become “epic heroes” (probably at the time of the insertion of the Bhagavadgītā into the epic). As evidence that the Indian tradition first knew of Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna as divinities, Jacobi cited Pāṇini *sūtra* 4.3.98 (*Vāsudevārjunābhyām vuñ* [sic]) and noted that Pāṇini “still knew of them [i.e., Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna] as a divine pair, who were worshipped.”²²⁰ He further laid out two scenarios to explain how this inverse euhemerization might have occurred: either the Bhagavadgītā was already in existence as a religious poem and then adapted by unnamed redactors to suit an epic Mahābhārata, or, these selfsame redactors either composed the Bhagavadgītā themselves or commissioned an “eminent Bhāgavata” to compose it for them. Whichever scenario we opt for, however, Jacobi argues that the Bhagavadgītā’s insertion into the epic would not have required expansion, but rather elimination of religious and philosophical details, both so as to reduce its length and so as to make it suit the epic context. There is clearly a lot of confusion in Jacobi’s mind about whether the Bhagavadgītā originally existed in the form of a brief epic Gītā (for which he has created an entire reconstruction) or in the form of a longer religious Gītā (which, according to his theory, must be earlier but according to his reconstruction, later). Added to this fundamental confusion, there is a second one. If the first of the two scenarios for a religious Gītā that Jacobi lays out is correct, then a longer poem was already

219. Ibid.

220. Ibid., 326.

in existence at the time the redactors of the Mahābhārata began to cast about for materials to include into the battle narrative of the sixth book (the Bhīṣmaparvan). Since these redactors (Holtzmann's Indo-Germans?) were in pursuit of a heroic epic, it makes sense to think that they would have cut out the religious and philosophical aspects of this original poem. (However, it makes no sense to imagine that the very same materials would later have found their way back into the poem, unless we want to imagine the Mahābhārata, as Oldenberg explicitly does, as a work in tension between "old and new India, [between] the India of the Aryan and of the Hindu"²²¹) But the second scenario is simply absurd: why would epic redactors either write or commission someone to write a full-fledged Bhagavadgītā only to then cut this work down to size? And, moreover, if their concern was to obtain a small, nontheological and nondoctrinal text, why approach an "eminent Bhāgavata" with the task?

These fundamental confusions in Jacobi's work suggest that he was far more ambiguous about the Holtzmannian narrative than appears at first. Although he accepted the elder scholar's ideas of heroic epic (even reconstructing the latter's epic Gītā in the process), he ultimately turned to a different source for explaining the dialogue between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna. Instead of claiming that Brahmins took over a heroic poem, he now seemed to think that unnamed epic redactors took over a religious poem centering on the worship of Vāsudeva and made it serviceable to their ends. Significantly, he broke with dogmatic orthodoxy precisely on the question of Kṛṣṇa's divinity. Indologists from Holtzmann to Hopkins had advanced the theory of the euhemerization of Kṛṣṇa as a central element of their Protestant critique of Indian faith. In the name of critical scholarship, they had put in place a pseudohistorical account of his divinization (based on a postulation of a fictionalized Indo-Germanic tribal culture) as a way of undermining the religious and philosophical reception these texts enjoyed in India. Jacobi, writing at the turn of the century, went along with their views of a heroic culture. Yet, when it came to the question of Kṛṣṇa's divinity, he turned against them. For him, it was more important to argue that Kṛṣṇa was originally a god and later became a man. Even though he explained this process historically via reference to Pāṇini rather than philosophically or theistically via reference to the concept of *avatāra*, the idea of incarnation was clearly present somewhere at the back of his concerns. (It is not implausible that Jacobi was aware that Holtzmann and Hopkins' historicization of Kṛṣṇa was implicitly based on an earlier historicization: the historicization of Christ undertaken by the Protestant critics F. C. Bauer and David Friedrich Strauß.) Nowhere will this be clearer than his defense of the Gītā's pantheism against Garbe.

DEFENDING PHILOSOPHICAL PANTHEISM

In his reconstruction of the original Gītā, Jacobi had not cited any secondary literature, though the influence of Holtzmann on this work is evident. It is not so

221. Oldenberg, *Das Mahābhārata*, 1.

easy to determine whether he had, by this point, already read Garbe's commentary on the *Gītā*. On the one hand, he does not mention Garbe nor does he allude to the debate over the *Gītā*'s pantheism between Holtzmann and Garbe. On the other, it is hardly likely he could have been unaware of the work of Garbe, the first Indologist to address the *Bhagavadgītā* in nearly eight decades. Garbe was the authority on the religions of India. His edition was the first *Bhagavadgītā* translation by a German Indologist since A.W. Schlegel's 1823 edition. It had been widely reviewed and discussed,²²² above all by Kurt Klemm in the *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* in 1906.²²³ Further, if, as seems likely, Jacobi knew of Holtzmann's views, he could hardly have been unaware of Garbe's debate with the latter.

However, as things stand, the first recorded reaction by Jacobi to Garbe's views we possess is his 1921 review of the 2nd revised edition of Garbe's 1905 translation of the *Bhagavad Gītā*. Published in the *Deutsche Literaturzeitung* in December 1921, Jacobi's review was especially critical of Garbe's attempted separation of theistic from pantheistic elements. In February 1922, Garbe responded in the pages of the same magazine with a sharp rejection of Jacobi's criticisms. Two months later, Jacobi responded to Garbe's response, and, in July 1922, Garbe finally closed the book on the debate with his "Mein Schlußwort zum Bhagavadgītā-Problem" ("My Last Word on the Bhagavadgītā-Problem"). We shall look at these four exchanges in order, beginning with Jacobi's review from 1921.

Jacobi's review begins as we might expect it to begin: with a defense of the "epic situation" as the central fact and the central motivation of the poem. He writes:

No one doubts that the Bh.g. did not belong to the original Mahābhārata. For this didactic poem, which encompasses more than 600 strophes, occurs in the [epic] poem at the precise moment when the armies of the Kurus and the Pāṇḍavas stand arrayed for battle before each other; no real poet would have destroyed the tense atmosphere [created] by the depiction of this situation by [inserting] a long lecture on philosophical and religious doctrines. Guided by Kṛṣṇa, Arjuna's battle-chariot is at the head of the Pāṇḍava ranks. He [i.e., Arjuna] sees his relatives among his enemies and despairs at the thought of having to kill them. Kṛṣṇa comforts him and admonishes him to perform his duty as a warrior; after all, he kills only the bodies, the souls are immortal (a doctrine that at that time first gained widespread acceptance). After this original speech of Kṛṣṇa's, which encompassed about 20 verses, the younger didactic poem was then inserted; in the course of this poem reference is made several times to the situation depicted. It is thus composed for the passage where it has been inserted and from this one can see that the Mahābhārata at the

222. See Garbe's foreword to the second edition (p. 3, n. 1). Among those to respond to his edition were Schroeder (1912), Hopkins (1905), Oldenberg (1919), M. Winternitz (1907 and 1909), F. Otto Schrader (1910), all cited earlier.

223. Kurt Klemm, "Indologie," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 60 (1906): 275–83 (the review of Garbe is on pp. 280–81). (Jacobi himself had an article in this volume.)

time no longer possessed a purely epic character but had already developed a pronounced didactic character.²²⁴

Following a brief summary of Garbe's views,²²⁵ he then addresses what is, for him, the crux of the matter: the divinity of Kṛṣṇa. In his words,

It is, however, a well-known fact that not only in the Bh.g. but also in some portions of the Mahābhārata and the Purāṇas, Kṛṣṇa appears as a human—all too human—hero and he is not for that reason considered to be any less a god, [indeed,] the highest god. He is verily a god *become* human, and his appearance as such says nothing about how the Indians conceived of divinity beyond its becoming human [Menschwerdung]. Its representation could therefore have been just as likely theistic as pantheistic.²²⁶

Garbe had simplistically advocated a theistic reading of the Bhagavadgītā as an element of his defense of German religious orthodoxy. He had entered the pantheism controversy (or, to be more precise, its echo in German Indology) with an aggressive defense of an austere, rational, and monotheistic religion as being most appropriate to ancient warriors. But this defense had been bought at the price of the loss of Kṛṣṇa's divinity: Kṛṣṇa was now reduced to a warrior, a folk hero, and founder of a simple, ethical Kṣatriya religion. Garbe had argued that, partly by a process of euhemerization and partly by a process of Brahmanic assimilation, Kṛṣṇa had finally come to be identified with the Brahmanic Supreme God Viṣṇu. But Garbe rejected this identification. For him, it entailed a corruption of the ethical warrior religion, a gradual infiltration of Brahmanic ideals into the central institutions of ancient Indian social life, and the rise of sacrifice, "the great source of income of the priesthood...."²²⁷ Of the view of Kṛṣṇa as an incarnation of God, he specifically noted that it was an "inversion of the real relationship," a "myth of transformation," and claimed, "in our case, euhemerism is the correct view."²²⁸ Brahmanism, according to him, was responsible for a whole host of evils: ritualism, materialism, and ceremonialism, ultimately leading to pantheism.

Jacobi, entering the debate in the wake of this identification of Brahmanism with pantheism and pantheism with atheism, argued for a more nuanced appreciation of

224. Jacobi, "Die Bhagavadgītā," 715–16.

225. "According to Garbe (p. 14f) Kṛṣṇa was originally portrayed in the Bh.g. as a personal god in the form of a human hero, after which the Vedāntic doctrine of brahma (the impersonal, pantheistic divinity) and of Māyā, the cosmic illusion, took shape [in the text]. This contradiction which runs through the Gītā 'lets itself only be eliminated on the assumption that one of the two contradictory doctrines placed in the mouth of the personal god Kṛṣṇa are a later addition' (p. 16). G. arrives at the conclusion that the pantheistic sections entered the poem in the wake of a revision of an originally theistic poem and can therefore be separated out [from the original] with a fair degree of certainty...." Ibid., 716.

226. Ibid., 716.

227. Garbe, *Die Bhagavadgītā*, 46.

228. Ibid., 31.

these terms. As he noted, “the two expressions [i.e., pantheism and atheism] applied to the Indian context require a closer determination.” He pointed out that “the decisive point for the Indian interpretation of divinity lies therein, whether god is [conceived of as] the material cause of the world or only [as] the effective [cause] (*causa efficiens*) thereof. The former is identical with our concept of pantheism, the latter does not correspond entirely to our theism.”²²⁹ Rather than placing theism (identified with a Kṣatriya religion with elements drawn from Sāṅkhya and Yoga) and pantheism (identified with a Brahmanism centering in a Vedāntic monistic ontology) into opposition, as Garbe had done, Jacobi argued that Indian thought knew of two approaches to conceiving of the relationship of God to the created world, neither of which was incompatible with monotheism and the idea of incarnation. “God as effective cause has *not* created matter and the souls; they are rather as eternal as he; he is, however, the controller of the world and of fate. The adherents of Yoga and different Śaivite sects, which set out partly from Sāṅkhya-philosophy and partly from Vaiśeṣika-philosophy, are theists in this sense,” he wrote.²³⁰ As he had clarified a line earlier, this meant that Indian theism, which was characterized by a belief in an eternally existing God, albeit not as creator of the world, since the world too existed in all eternity, was not entirely identical “to our theism.” In contrast, pantheism in both the Western and Eastern contexts meant the same: to conceive of God as “the material cause of the world.” Here he noted that the adherents of “the Upaniṣads (*Aupaniṣada*), of Vedānta-philosophy and other religious systems, among them the Bhāgavatas (Śāṅkara on B. S. II 2, 42) or Pāncarātras, of whom one assumes that they are ultimately traceable back to a religious community established by Kṛṣṇa” were all “pantheists.” But, argued Jacobi, this did not mean that the Bhagavadgītā, insofar as it knew of a personal god Kṛṣṇa and of a Supreme Being Viṣṇu who had become mortal (as Kṛṣṇa), was necessarily theistic. “Both interpretations [i.e., the theistic and the pantheistic],” he argued, “are reconcilable with montheism as well as with the doctrine of a highest absolute divinity and do not exclude becoming human (*Avatāra*).”²³¹

Even though Jacobi presented his critique of Garbe as a contribution to “critical” scholarship, there was clearly a religious subtext to his assertion. As a Catholic, it was important for him to insist on the idea of incarnation, even if it was in the form of a defense of the divinity of Kṛṣṇa. But, it was equally important for him, as a Catholic, to set apart Hindu theism from Christian theism and he could best do this by distinguishing between Hindu and Catholic concepts of God. Reviving the Creator/created distinction, he argued that Indian tradition did not really understand God’s transcendence. It made no space for God’s creation as a unique occurrence, taking place at the beginning of time. Rather, since according to Indian thought the world too existed in all eternity (being brought forth at the beginning of a cosmic cycle and reabsorbed at its end), Indian forms of theism were not strictly congruent with

229. Jacobi, “Die Bhagavadgītā,” 716.

230. *Ibid.*, 716–17 (Jacobi’s emphasis).

231. *Ibid.*, 717.

Western monotheism. Both theism and pantheism (in the Indian sense) were reconcilable with monotheism.

By radicalizing the distinction between pantheism and theism, Jacobi was also attacking Garbe at his core. At the same time as he fought a rearguard action against Hindu theism, he was also able to take on the challenge of Garbe's Protestant fundamentalism. In his bid to vindicate Holtzmann's ancient Indo-Germans of the charge of pantheism, Garbe had simplistically identified Kṣatriya religion with the worship of Kṛṣṇa and the latter, in turn, with monotheism. By doing so, he able to generate a picture of Germanic culture as proto-Christian, indeed, as sympathetic to Protestant ideas of Christianity. The latter, of course, was a major concern in his attempted rehabilitation of Indology as the study of ancient India after Holtzmann. Jacobi, however, argued that either theism or pantheism could underlie Indian ideas of divinity. Indian theism, which did not know God as the Creator, was no more conducive to the cult of Kṛṣṇa than Indian pantheism, which could conceive of the impersonal Brahman as absolute divinity. Against Garbe's identification of theism with the Kṣatriyas and pantheism with the Brahmans, Jacobi also argued that the warrior caste itself had an interest in pantheistic ideas. In his words,

If the martial hero [Kṛṣṇa], as has been assumed, founded a popular religion, then the question is, whether this was founded on pantheism or theism (in the Indian sense). The former is a priori to be accepted, because Kṛṣṇa, the son of Devakī, belongs to the older Upaniṣad period (Chāndogya Upaniṣad 3, 17, 6) and was therefore rooted in the intellectual world of the Upaniṣads, since after all the warrior caste or the Kṣatriyas had a lively interest in "Brahma research" and made independent contributions to it.²³²

The picture Jacobi produced of the Bhagavadgītā was thus far more complex than Garbe's. First, he rejected the theism/pantheism distinction in its absolute form (inherited from the pantheism controversy of F. Jacobi and Mendelssohn). Second, he rejected the Kṣatriya/Brahman distinction in its proto-Protestant form (inherited from Lassen and Holtzmann). Instead, he related a much more complex story in which spiritual ideas had always been part of Kṣatriya society, the Upaniṣads in particular being testament to their high level of intellectual and cultural development. Complicating Garbe's narrative of a gradual infiltration of heroic tradition by a priestly culture, Jacobi argued that "for the pure theism proclaimed by Garbe to work out, the Upaniṣadic elements in Kṛṣṇa's religion would have to be subsequently eliminated and later reinserted into the Bh.g. by the Vedāntic redactors of the poem assumed by Garbe."²³³ Jacobi thus split Indian pantheism itself into two traditions, each having a different source. On the one hand, there was the pantheism of the Kṣatriyas rooted in the Upaniṣads; on the other, the pantheism of the Brahman rooted in Vedāntic texts, especially the Vedānta Sūtras and later commentaries. Since

232. Ibid.

233. Ibid.

the Bhagavadgītā according to him preceded the latter, its pantheism was innate to it and not the imposition of Brahmins. Jacobi notes:

I speak explicitly of Upaniṣad doctrines and not of those of Vedānta philosophy. The latter first begins with the Vedānta Sūtra of Bādarāyaṇa and is, in my view, younger than the Bh.g. The V. S. bases its doctrines upon revelation (*śruti*), but also adduces the tradition (*smṛti*), which possesses a limited authority, as support. In three passages (I 3,23. II 3,45. IV 2,21) where the *sūtras* refer to *smṛti*, the commentators relate the reference to the Bh.g. alone (namely, XV 6.12 or XIV 2; XV 7 7; VIII 23 ff). In IV 2, 21 (*yogināḥ prati ca smaryate smārte caite*) the first two words refer unmistakably to the relevant passage of the Bh.g., so that its priority to the V. S. can hardly be doubted.²³⁴

Jacobi had thus found a way to anchor pantheism in the Gītā, while still accepting the Holtzmannian narrative of a heroic epic tradition. By distinguishing between a philosophical pantheism (i.e., that of the Upaniṣads) and an orthodox pantheism (that of Vedānta), he was able to overturn Garbe's identification of pantheism with orthodox systems. To be sure, his argument rested on the Bhagavadgītā being earlier than the Vedānta Sūtra. But here, as all Indologists before him had done, he could conveniently invoke the category of "interpolation" to dismiss evidence contrary to his thesis. In his words,

If, in contrast, someone were to raise the objection that XIII 4 refers to V. S. (*brahmasūtra-padais*), then my response is that this verse is obviously an interpolation. For, at the end of verse 3 stands "hear" (*śṛṇu*) and what is to be heard stands in verse 5; both naturally belong unbroken together and are only rent asunder by the inserted verse 4 contrary to their nature.²³⁵

Jacobi concluded:

If my conclusion is correct, then already by the time of the composition of the V. S. the Bh.g. was already considered a *smṛti*, a semi-holy book, specifically, the work in its *revised* form according to Garbe, since he characterizes VIII 23 ff., to which V. S. IV 2, 21 refers, as interpolations.²³⁶

Lest we overlook the fact that what was at stake in this game of dating texts was not the Indian poem itself, but the differing conceptions of religion held by the two scholars, Jacobi also clarified, "It is hardly possible for us finite mortals to realize the transcendent in thought (XII 5). Instead the most appropriate means of reaching the highest goal is to meditate on a concrete divinity or some other form of love for god depending upon the higher or lower disposition of the worshiper." He argued

234. Ibid.

235. Ibid., 717–18.

236. Ibid., 718 (Jacobi's emphasis).

that “this thought” was “completely in keeping with the character of a popular religion, which is aimed not merely at ascetics and thinkers but just as much at a man anchored in a life of activity.”²³⁷ The Bhagavadgītā, thus, although setting out from a pantheistic frame of reference, could still recommend a monotheistic form of worship as “the most appropriate means” for humans, especially average citizens, to attain the highest goal. It was not simply a work for “ascetics and thinkers” and, by implication, it was wrong of Garbe to associate its popular character with an anti-clerical stance. Jacobi’s conclusion is succinct:

As concerns the core point of the question raised, however, it follows from the reflections above that even in the “genuine” portions of the Bh.g. the “intransient” and the “transient,” that is, primordial matter and all the things that proceed from it according to Sāṅkhya are not considered independent things distinct from the highest divinity (Īśvara) as in Yoga. Rather, they are regarded as components of Parmātman as in Vedānta. Therewith I believe I have refuted G.’s theory of the revision of the Bh.g.²³⁸

Jacobi had thus undermined the very basis for Garbe’s assertion of a theistic philosophy to the original poem: if Sāṅkhya too (and not just Vedānta) was not theistic in the Western sense inasmuch as it did not exhibit a clearly marked dualism between the highest divinity and everything that proceeded from him, there was no basis for asserting that the original Gītā was theistic.

In his reply from February 1922, Garbe rejected every single one of Jacobi’s criticisms. He conceded that “a completely decisive proof is not to be presented in this important question concerning the history of religion, but only a high degree of probability to be gained,”²³⁹ but nonetheless insisted that Jacobi’s reconstruction of ancient Indian ideas of religion was no more rigorous than his. “Now, however, Jacobi cannot possibly assume that the philosophical systems of the Indians are as young as their Sūtra works composed for the school system, whose aphoristic form alone demonstrates that they are not the first conceptions but the final, summarizing presentations. The age of the systems and that of their Sūtras are two completely different things....”²⁴⁰ Garbe also rejected Jacobi’s challenge that his original Gītā, if it was to be a purely theistic text, had to be free of all Upaniṣadic elements. “Where had I then ever claimed that in the genuine Bhag. no Upaniṣad doctrines were acknowledged? Have I not explicitly (p. 70, n. 1) pointed out the multiple, at times *verbatim* adaptations of the ‘purified’ Bhag. from passages of the older Upaniṣads?”²⁴¹ Garbe repeated his conviction that the vacillation between the theistic and pantheistic outlook in the Gītā was not an organic one, but the result of the addition of pantheistic doctrines to

237. Ibid., 719.

238. Ibid.

239. Garbe, “Noch einmal das Bhagavadgītā-Problem,” 98.

240. Ibid., 99.

241. Ibid., 101.

the original text, even if these additions could not (in spite of his best efforts) always be identified:

What Jacobi then describes in column 719 via a reference to Bhag. XII. 2ff. and XV. 16ff. as the crux of the question raised, provides, in my view, the opposite. J. finds in these “genuine” passages of the Bhag.—if I may briefly say so—an organic mixture of theistic and pantheistic ideas, whereas in the first passage the two perspectives are sharply distinguished and the theistic [perspective] advanced as the more correct one. I would also like to remind [the reader] of what I had said on p. 24 of my Introduction: “I do not harbor the delusion that I have succeeded in excising *all* non-genuine portions of the Bhag. in this manner. There will still be some verses which have been added in the revision, of which no word stands in the original poem.”²⁴²

The wider problem, of course, which neither Garbe nor Jacobi were willing to address, was that in the absence of a mutually accepted text, any and all assertions of the Gītā could be true. Since neither was willing to assign canonicity to the Bhagavadgītā as handed down, the debate could not continue meaningfully. Garbe could not accept the Bhagavadgītā as handed down because the existence of what he thought were “pantheistic” elements in the text brought Indology into jeopardy. In light of the pantheism controversy, no one could recommend a discipline associated with the study of pantheistic texts. Recall that Heine, commenting on Schlegel’s *Die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier*, had written that “the scent of frankincense streamed out of this book.”²⁴³ He might as well have said “the scent of sulfur” for all the associations Catholicism evoked in Germany after Luther. Garbe was sophisticated enough to realize that there was a problem with Holtzmann’s attribution of pantheistic doctrines to the ancient Indo-Germans, but he was not sophisticated enough to solve the problem philosophically through adjudicating between the Bhagavadgītā’s different perspectives.²⁴⁴ It was clear to him that the only way to render the Gītā safe for Indology was

242. Ibid., 102 (Garbe’s emphasis).

243. The reference is to Heine’s review of the book in *Heinrich Heines Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 5, cited earlier. See *ibid.*, 270.

244. As noted earlier, the pantheistic confusion (as opposed to the pantheism controversy) is ultimately rooted in a misunderstanding concerning ancient ontology, specifically the distinction between empirical objects and their transcendental and conceptual (i.e., ideal) conditions. In the Bhagavadgītā (and even more so in the related Nārāyaṇīya), the authors of the text clearly distinguish between various gradations of being. Thus, Kṛṣṇa is Brahman (Being), but also Yogeśvara (Lord). Additionally, he exists in universal, fourfold, and mortal forms. Indeed, the text introduces an entire gamut of terms to characterize these various ontological levels: Supreme Person, Nature, the Unmanifest, the Indestructible, and so on. All these exceed the manifest, destructible creation. Without being cognizant of these distinctions and without grasping the way each preceding ontological level was implicit in the successive ones without being identical with them, the Indologists resorted to the catchphrase “pantheism” as a convenient way of classifying (and, as we have seen, of eliminating) certain verses found to be repugnant. To them, it seemed self-evident that if a text asserted that God was coextensive with his creation, this was evidence of its “pantheism.” The inevitable consequence was a leveling of the text’s carefully constructed ontological distinctions, and the rise of a pseudoproblem: was the Bhagavadgītā pantheistic?

to censor the text. Although ostensibly a contribution to “critical” scholarship on the poem, his edition of the Gītā had the effect of censoring the pantheistic doctrines of the Bhagavadgītā. And lest his edition still be accused of pantheism, he could defend himself that he had never claimed to have identified “*all* the nongenuine [he might as well have said, heretical] portions of the Bhag. in this manner,”²⁴⁵ as he explicitly reminded Jacobi:

I may therefore protect myself [against the unfair treatment] that a few verses that I considered genuine and which are perhaps after all inserted verses should be treated as the basis for a rejection of my theory.²⁴⁶

In spite of their claims and counterclaims, however, no resolution was possible. Once they had embarked on the task of “critically” editing the Bhagavadgītā (i.e., tailoring it to their religious prejudices), there was no longer a stable basis for discussion available. Garbe complained that Jacobi had “overlooked one of [Garbe’s] most important arguments, namely, the observation that in the wake of [Garbe’s] excisions nowhere does a real gap arise in the Bhag., rather in many places the broken contexture is restored and that the Bhag. purified in this way significantly improves in poetic beauty and coherence [Geschlossenheit] on the transmitted text.”²⁴⁷ Jacobi countered with the observation that “the pantheistic view, which according to G.’s opinion is supposed to have been foreign to the original Bh.g. also turns up in the parts acknowledged by him as genuine.”²⁴⁸ He then challenged Garbe to acknowledge that these verses, too, now needed to be removed as per his theory of the original Gītā. “If there are truly pantheistic traces to be found, he will also remove the concerned verses. That naturally cannot be forbidden him. If in the actual didactic poem which contains more than 600 verses, 170 verses, that is, over a fourth of the whole, are supposed to be interpolated, a few verses more or less will not matter.”²⁴⁹

In effect, Jacobi was now forcing Garbe’s argument to a *reductio ad absurdum*. In fact, if we accept his argument that Sāṃkhya, too, does not see God in separation from creation, a reconstruction of the original Gītā cannot even count on the Sāṃkhya elements being genuine. Further, as he pointed out, the “*crux of the question, the actual problem*,” lay in the “fusion of theistic and pantheistic views” in the Gītā.²⁵⁰ If, as Jacobi held, the two terms were not mutually exclusive in the Indian context, Garbe’s entire reasoning for a Gītā purified of “pantheistic” elements fell by the wayside. Writes Jacobi:

I ask myself: if since approximately 4th century AD Indians manifestly have not taken issue with this fusion of such heterogenous concepts of god, which appears so strange to us, then it is also not evident why this fusion should not have been

245. Garbe, *Die Bhagavadgītā*, 24 (Garbe’s emphasis).

246. Garbe, “Noch einmal das Bhagavadgītā-Problem,” 102.

247. *Ibid.*, 104.

248. Jacobi, “Weiteres zum Bhagavadgītā-Problem,” 265.

249. *Ibid.*, 266.

250. *Ibid.* (Jacobi’s emphasis).

acceptable to Indian thought in the past as well. At any rate, for the assumption of a fundamental change objective reasons must be forthcoming; but such factual considerations are lacking [in Garbe's work]. We therefore cannot get around seeing in the text of the Bh.g. as handed down essentially a faithful expression of religious beliefs predominant at the time of its composition in the Kṛṣṇaistic communities.²⁵¹

With this remark, Jacobi essentially pushed Garbe into a corner. In an attempt to justify his critical project, Garbe had earlier countered the objection that "the *Indians* did not see a contradiction in [the *Gītā's*] combination of theism and pantheism," with the suggestion that their "syncretic tendencies" had made them oblivious to a contradiction that was, at least for Western scholars, an evident fact.²⁵² Jacobi, however, raised a fatal objection: what if Indians had not felt there to be a contradiction between pantheism and theism at the time of its composition itself (rather than only later during its reception)? In that case, Garbe's objections were moot. If Garbe wished to declare syncretism characteristic of Indian tradition, then he had to accept it for its beginning as well. Indeed, sharpening the objection, Jacobi noted, "if we accept the text as purified by G. as the original Bhagavadgītā, we find something absolutely essential to be missing. This Gospel of the Kṛṣṇa religion engages with the most varied religious and philosophical perspectives; and yet it is supposed to have not touched upon the most important perspective of all, the doctrine of the All-Divinity, of brahma and ātman, made holy through Revelation, with even a word" and then he exclaimed: "That is utterly unbelievable!"²⁵³ A *Gītā* purified of its pantheism, he implied, would also be a *Gītā* purified of its syncretism, that is, its tendency to approach and engage with other traditions.

In essence, Jacobi was exposing Garbe's project as anti-Catholicist (if not, indeed, as simply anti-Catholic) and fundamentalist. Garbe's attempt to purify the text ran aground on many presuppositions, not least that the Indians had no such clear notion of authentic, pure revelation. Once this fundamentalist aspect of his work was revealed, Garbe responded petulantly that "it is naturally not possible to continue the discussion in DLZ in the current manner; furthermore, a continuation would also not have the outcome that one of us might convince the other of the incorrectness of his perspective." He rejected Jacobi's suggestion of a synthesis with the claim that "in the passages under consideration (IV. 31f., V. 16ff., 24ff., VIII. 1ff., XIII.12 ff. etc.), Brahman is spoken of *suddenly*, without it being anywhere suggested that Krishna and Brahman are the same."²⁵⁴ And once again he claimed that the passages that refer to Brahman appear throughout "as something foreign."²⁵⁵ Clearly, he wished to reject any suggestion that pantheism could have had any role in the outlook of his ancient Indians. It was more important to emphasize the "foreign"

251. Ibid., 266–67.

252. Garbe, *Die Bhagavadgītā*, 12 (Garbe's emphasis).

253. Jacobi, "Weiteres zum Bhagavadgītā-Problem," 272–73.

254. Garbe, "Mein Schlusswort zum Bhagavadgītā-Problem," 604 (Garbe's emphasis).

255. Ibid.

nature of pantheism vis-à-vis the original Bhagavadgītā than to read the poem in philosophically illuminating ways. It was important, even at the price of fundamentalism and religious censorship, to uphold the purity of the original Revelation.

THE KṚṢṆA GĪTĀ OF HERMANN OLDENBERG

Although Garbe's reconstruction did not hold up against Jacobi's criticisms, his more general propositions about the need for critical reconstruction were nonetheless widely influential. Jacobi himself, as we have seen, adopted Garbe's assumption of an original text (to be recovered on the basis of so-called historical and critical considerations). Even though he disagreed with Garbe on almost every point of his reconstruction, he did not hesitate to offer his own reconstruction based on similar ideas of an epic original. Likewise, Hermann Oldenberg (1854–1920), the next scholar to consider the matter, accepted Garbe's presuppositions regarding the method and aims of Gītā scholarship. In his 1919 article, "Bemerkungen zur Bhagavadgītā,"²⁵⁶ Oldenberg initially offered a comprehensive critique of Garbe's theory of a theistic Sāṃkhya-influenced original.²⁵⁷ Oldenberg argued that the idea that the Bhagavadgītā, being theistic, must be older than other sections of the epic (and the theistic sections of the Gītā themselves the oldest in the text) did not follow from the fact that Kṛṣṇa was introduced differently (i.e., as a man, a counselor, a hero or a god) in different sections of the epic. As he put it, it is "quite natural that, in the context of the epic, the narration of battles and councils in which Kṛṣṇa appears offers less occasion to reflect upon the more esoteric doctrine of the metaphysical supremacy of his Being than is the case in the speculative Gītā."²⁵⁸ Hence, he rejected Garbe's idea that a theistic original could be recovered on the basis of such considerations.²⁵⁹

256. Hermann Oldenberg, "Bemerkungen zur Bhagavadgītā," 321–38.

257. Oldenberg's critique was built on ideas he had already explored in an earlier article ("Zur Geschichte der Sāṃkhya-Philosophie," *Nachrichten von der königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen, Philologisch-historische Klasse* [1917]: 218–53; reprinted in Hermann Oldenberg, *Kleine Schriften*, vol. 2, ed. Klaus L. Janert [Wiesbaden: Fritz Steiner Verlag, 1967], 1423–58) in which he had argued against Garbe's ideas of Sāṃkhya philosophy that Garbe failed to adequately distinguish between classical Sāṃkhya (which is what Garbe had in mind when he spoke of the school) and its pre-classical variants. Oldenberg's main concern was to demonstrate against Garbe, the great advocate of theistic Sāṃkhya rationality, that Sāṃkhya had earlier been more open to Vedic and Brahmanic ideas of impersonal Being.

258. Oldenberg, "Bemerkungen," 323.

259. "Garbe's deletions do not prove more successful in the individual case than the principle upon which they are based.... Reading the Gītā with these deletions gives me the impression that the text has been mastered with violence here according to considerations from a distant reality that have been applied to the text. Now here, now there, the critical knife sets upon a passage that is closely and intrinsically linked to its surrounding on the evidence of a 'Vedāntic' catchword and cuts it out of its entire context." Oldenberg, "Bemerkungen," 331–32.

Oldenberg nonetheless remained committed to the idea of an original *Gītā* and in fact reverted to a form of Holtzmann's thesis that the original *Gītā* must have been a brief battlefield encomium written for a militaristic war epic. Thus, he argued that the "linchpin" to the entire composition lay in verse 2.39.²⁶⁰ Before Oldenberg, Jacobi had already proposed that the crux of the *Gītā* lay in verse 2.37. Jacobi claimed that Kṛṣṇa's argument comes to an end with this verse. Thereafter, he argued, extensive didactic sections had been interpolated into the poem; these, however, were unrelated to the "epic situation" and the original poem resumed only with verse 18.73. To this compact epic *Gītā* of 23 verses, Jacobi proposed adding sections of *Mahābhārata* 6.44 to present an unambiguous (and uninterrupted) narrative of the build up for war. Oldenberg shared Jacobi's conviction that the original *Gītā* could not have been longer than a few verses and centered mainly around the problem of how to get Arjuna to return to the war. As he put it, "Arjuna laments the imminent bloodbath and thinks of deserting the battle. Kṛṣṇa turns to him II, 11ff. with his appeal."²⁶¹ However, he disagreed with him on the individual details of this account. Jacobi had proposed a tripartite analysis of the original *Gītā* structured around the use of the words *anāryajuṣṭa*, *asvargya*, and *akirtikara* in verse 2. Oldenberg, however rejected his analysis with the words that it "simply did not appear to him to be correct."²⁶² Instead, he proposed a bipartite analysis of the original poem, based on the assumption that Kṛṣṇa, in the original text, offered a twofold response to Arjuna's indecision:

1. Verses 11–30: There is no reason to lament. For the spirit, changing its physical abode is itself eternal, unkillable.²⁶³
2. Verses 31–38: Furthermore, the soldier's duty and his fear of dishonor demand that he fight. You conquer and gain the earth, or you fall and enter heaven.²⁶⁴

According to Oldenberg, this meant that only the first 38 verses of chapter 2 (and possibly chapter 1, although he was silent on this) could have been part of the original poem. As he put it, "up to verse 38 everything stands in the closest relation to the situation, out of which the entire dialogue arose. Arjuna does not want to fight and laments about the ones who will fall in battle; what is at stake is to motivate him to fight, to bring his lament to silence: everything is oriented toward that." Thereafter, however, Oldenberg found everything in the text to be "pure theory." "Only the briefest, most meager references to the occasion for all these discussions are scattered in between here and there; in essence, it has been forgotten that one finds oneself on the battlefield and that, before the battle could begin, the scruples of a central combatant had to be allayed."²⁶⁵

260. *Ibid.*, 332.

261. *Ibid.*

262. *Ibid.*, 334, n. 1.

263. *Ibid.*, 332–33.

264. *Ibid.*, 333.

265. *Ibid.*

Although he thus implicitly built on Jacobi's ideas of an original epic Gītā, Oldenberg plainly considered this original poem to be less decisive for Gītā criticism than the additions that followed thereafter. Calling chapters 2.39 to 12 the "main body of the entire Gītā,"²⁶⁶ he argued that it was these sections (rather than the original Gītā) that had become canonical among Indian authors as the Bhagavadgītā. It was this expanded poem scholars had in mind when they spoke of the didactic poem called the Bhagavadgītā. Thus, he argued that Schrader's remark that "the oldest Gītā was already at an end at II, 38" was "fully correct," but only "as long as we wish to reserve the description Gītā for this little piece."²⁶⁷

How did Oldenberg characterize this expanded text? First he noted that it "only superficially paid heed to the external situation." Instead, its main concern was "Yoga, especially its orientation toward Kṛṣṇa."²⁶⁸ Chapters 2.39 to 5, for instance, once again took up the question "with which the foregoing original sections of the poem were concerned: whether Arjuna should fight."²⁶⁹ However, the question was now "universalized, raised to another level."²⁷⁰ The answer, "given from the perspective of Yoga is this. The one striving in yoga has to draw his senses back from the world of objects, he should have equanimity and be internally firm, defeat the enemy lust: *but he must act*, not seeking the fruits of action, but rather fulfilling his duty [filled] with inner peace."²⁷¹ In chapter 7, Oldenberg saw "a certain progression." "The theme of action is now left behind. The poem speaks [instead] of meditation." Likewise, chapter 8 marked a "great turning point." "Whereas until then the main concern was Yoga in general, from now on (VII[I]–XII) Kṛṣṇa, the *mahāyogeśvara* (XI, 9) steps into the foreground."²⁷² According to Oldenberg, each of these chapters dealt with "individual aspects of the theme . . . thus, in the concluding section of [chapter] IX *bhakti*, which, as has been known since a long time, has the closest connection to Yoga; in [chapter] X the *vibhūṭayaḥ* of the God. The XIth chapter culminates in a majestic appearance of the God in his universal form. Thus, thereafter (chap. XII) one ought take the shorter path and worship *him*: in immersion, in meditation, in works while giving up their results, in knowledge, [and] in equanimity."²⁷³

Even though Oldenberg raised the possibility of certain passages being interpolations into the expanded Gītā itself (for instance, verses 2.26–27,²⁷⁴ or, alternatively, 2.11–37²⁷⁵; also verses 6.14, 15, 30 and 31²⁷⁶ and perhaps 5.29²⁷⁷), on the whole he

266. Ibid.

267. Ibid., 334 (The reference is to the Schrader article cited earlier, "Über Bhagavadgītā II, 42.").

268. Oldenberg, "Bemerkungen zur Bhagavadgītā," 334.

269. Ibid., 334–35.

270. Ibid., 335.

271. Ibid. (Oldenberg's emphasis).

272. Ibid.

273. Ibid. (Oldenberg's emphasis).

274. Ibid., 333, n. 1.

275. Ibid., 333, n. 2.

276. Ibid., 336.

277. Ibid., 336, n. 2.

was more circumspect than either Garbe or Jacobi about the prospect of identifying such changes. As he acknowledged, the “use of source materials which did not know of Kṛṣṇa” in chapter 6 could have been the occasion for “the relationship to this god stepping into the background [in this chapter].” However, he was less willing to concede this of the sections following chapter 12, which he considered to be clear interpolations into a Kṛṣṇa Gītā. “In a wide spun context, the Yoga that is dedicated to Kṛṣṇa and [the theme of] Kṛṣṇa’s glory was presented. But we cannot read further in [chapter] XIII without the sense of having landed in completely different regions.”²⁷⁸ Invoking von Humboldt, he argued for seeing the “concluding sections” of the Bhagavadgītā as “additions.”²⁷⁹ Writing that it seemed “beyond doubt” to him that the “break” between “the great Kṛṣṇa-Yoga-poem and the appendix or appendices” lay here, he argued that the Gītā in chapters 13–18 conveyed “doctrines about issues lying far from its central concerns,” doing so, furthermore, in an altogether “different, dry and schoolmasterly, indeed, pedantic tone.”²⁸⁰

We need not pursue Oldenberg’s comments about individual chapters further here. However, as he strongly defends the idea that the Bhagavadgītā was essentially a poem in worship of Kṛṣṇa, we need to examine his views of the Kṛṣṇa cult in greater detail, articulated mainly in his 1922 book on the Mahābhārata. As we have seen, Oldenberg made a distinction between the original epic, Brahmanic additions, and a Kṛṣṇaite revision. He regarded the original epic as a heroic war narrative and contrasted it with the later Mahābhārata, which he attributed to Brahmanic and Kṛṣṇaite circles. Writing that the “younger, didactic portions of the epic are no longer as preferentially [at home] in the northwest, the land of Janamejaya, as the old ones,” he argued for seeing the epic as having “freed itself from its moorings in its original motherland.” It was now “bound up with the interests of a stronger and more enduring power than that of this dynasty [i.e., the lineage of Janamejaya, which Oldenberg considered a historical dynasty],” a power able to “secure the great prestige of the poem far beyond the domain and the duration of the rule of the Pāṇḍavas. This power was Brahmanhood.” “And one must add,” he clarified, “linked with this, a second one: the worship of Kṛṣṇa.”²⁸¹

How did Oldenberg characterize this shift in authority? According to him, Kṛṣṇa was introduced “very early on—perhaps already in the period of the prose-poetry narrative” into the story. However, he thought his antecedents to lie outside the epic, specifically, in Chāndogya Upaniṣad 3.17.6. Declaring that “Vedic antiquity is thereby secured for him,” he suggested that Kṛṣṇa probably first became familiar to the epic poets via the “the clan of the Satvants, to which the later but reliable tradition accords him.” This clan, he argued, “had contacts with the Bhāratas of the epic; contacts that suggest that a Vedic reference [to Kṛṣṇa] is [intended as] antagonistic.”²⁸² In somewhat confused argumentation, he proposed that this reference was

278. Ibid., 336.

279. Ibid., 336–37.

280. Ibid., 337.

281. Oldenberg, *Das Mahābhārata*, 12.

282. Ibid., 37.

to a historical Kṛṣṇa, who later became the prototype of the god Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva. As he put it,

Behind the figure of this all too human man, of this hero, [and] without being really reconciled with it, appears, to the faith of the devotees and to the faith of the epic as well, the god: a god of a different vitality than the largely faded Vedic gods or the abstractions of speculation, acting powerfully from person to person, demanding and repaying the love (bhakti) of his own [followers]—and then, ultimately, soaring above all limitations of personality, expanding himself to infinity in the All-Being.²⁸³

In order to trace the evolution of this conception of Kṛṣṇa's "human-divine double-nature," Oldenberg took up Garbe's view of "the real Kṛṣṇa" as "the chieftain of a tribe, but also simultaneously the founder of a monotheistic religion independent of the Veda that gained widespread currency." However, he rejected the latter's three-stage apotheosis, arguing that there is "nothing in his [i.e., Kṛṣṇa's] physiognomy to suggest a religious teacher."²⁸⁴ Rather, he proposed that "the step from prince to god" would have occurred directly "without the detour via the founder of a religion." "If I may trust our fantasy to recognize reality out of the legend across great distances," wrote Oldenberg, "we might imagine him as a victorious hero [Siegernatur] to ourselves, equally irresistible to [his] enemies and to women." "Even today in India as nowhere else, one is inclined to deify the most impressive personalities." "This took place . . . nowhere in India with such great success as precisely here [Oldenberg means the deification of the hero Kṛṣṇa]."²⁸⁵

Regarding the identification of Kṛṣṇa with Viṣṇu, Oldenberg argued that, with the rise in popularity of the cult, "contact" between "the Vedic-Brahmanic Being and this [cult of] Kṛṣṇa veneration" became unavoidable and an assimilation of the two was inevitable. Though the latter was "essentially foreign to" their ideas of Brahman, the Brahmins were forced to incorporate Kṛṣṇa into their pantheon. Inevitably, there occurred a "mixing-up in which . . . both parts found their due and, in particular, the Vedic faith, which was already tending to infirmity with age, was provided fresh blood. . . ."²⁸⁶ As Oldenberg described the process, the Brahmins, following "a process that we . . . frequently observe even today in India [namely, that] a certain tribe that had stood apart from Brahmanism up to now comes into contact with it [and] very soon one discovers that their god is nothing other than one of the great brahmanic gods," quickly assimilated "the new god or divine man among the old gods of the Veda."²⁸⁷ They "practically legitimized [Kṛṣṇa] through linking him to traditional divine names and essences," to produce the composite deity Kṛṣṇa-Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa.²⁸⁸ According to Oldenberg, the reason for choosing Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa "in the case of

283. *Ibid.*, 38–39.

284. *Ibid.*, 39.

285. *Ibid.*, 40.

286. *Ibid.*

287. *Ibid.*

288. *Ibid.*

Kṛṣṇa” was the story of Viṣṇu’s three footsteps: “with his three gigantic footsteps, he attained the highest peak of the universe. There is to be found ‘the highest footprint of Viṣṇu’ or ‘Viṣṇu’s highest abode’.”²⁸⁹ In contrast, Nārāyaṇa was “originally a totally independent god from Viṣṇu, which the theological fantasy of the later Vedic period had created . . . [and] in [whom] . . . are embodied confused representations of a primordial sacrificer, of an essence that is associated with the emergence of the cosmic order, indeed, an essence that includes the universe in itself.” Yet, for reasons not wholly clear, “this Nārāyaṇa [was] now fused together in many places—by no means everywhere—with Viṣṇu and with Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva.”²⁹⁰ While the processes at work in this homologization were not fully clear to Oldenberg,²⁹¹ he insisted that the theory of Kṛṣṇa’s euhemerization (and only it!) held the key to the reconstruction of the epic. As he put it, “Now [coming] back from this detour concerning Kṛṣṇa’s essence to his role in the epic. How do these developments in the history of religions reflect themselves in this [i.e., the epic] and its development?”²⁹² His response to this question was threefold:

1. He described the different passages in which Kṛṣṇa appears in different roles or guises as follows:

One encounters Kṛṣṇa again and again, not just in individual episodes, but throughout the entire poem. There are disbelievers who deny his divinity. For the one who sees rightly, in spite of his human appearance, nothing is more certain than this. He concludes the closest alliance and brother-in-law-hood with Arjuna. . . . He becomes Arjuna’s charioteer, continuously supports the Pāṇḍavas’ side; sanctions, as we have seen, questionable deeds of these heroes by his divine authority. “Where there is Kṛṣṇa, there is victory!” His role reaches its climax when, in the Bhagavadgītā immediately before the great battle, he reveals to his friend that powerful and deep image of the world and the beyond, in the midst of which his own divine-human, divine form [gottmenschliche, göttliche Gestalt] stands.²⁹³

2. He suggested that certain passages were more indicative of the older epic than others:

In all this, I cannot avoid the impression that we would hardly encounter Kṛṣṇa and the veneration of Kṛṣṇa in the *original* epic—if we could only reach back to it. By nature, this cycle of legends and that of the Bhāratas appears to have been totally separate.²⁹⁴

289. Ibid., 40–41.

290. Ibid., 41.

291. “Whether thus, that he first merged with Viṣṇu and then Kṛṣṇa with this double-essence,” he asked, or, “did the representations of the highest transcendental abode (Viṣṇu) and of the first origin of the world and the cosmic order (Nārāyaṇa) attract each other at first and thereafter poured out their fullness in the human who had become god (Kṛṣṇa), who now appeared as a god who had become a man?” Ibid.

292. Ibid., 42.

293. Ibid.

294. Ibid. (Oldenberg’s emphasis).

3. He argued that the older passages of the epic would have been those closer to Vedic ideas and that these, by their very nature, could not have included Kṛṣṇa as a deity:

If one examines the old prose-poetry sections, one will find in them a world of ideas that stood so close to the Veda, that one can with difficulty imagine the veneration of Kṛṣṇa in it. And does not Kṛṣṇa also carry a trace of foreignness in relation to his surroundings even in the remaining poem so often as he is present there? Not a fighting hero, but a charioteer. Theosophist on the battlefield. Counselor in matters that could also have occurred without his advice, and where he is often only there in order to render questionable actions acceptable—matters that would hardly have appeared questionable to high antiquity.²⁹⁵

As Oldenberg told it, there would have taken place a process of “confusion” of the “Vedic-Brahmanic catalogue of ideas with the Kṛṣṇaite,” until it “appeared out of the question to the narrators, that this personality towering above all existence could have been uninvolved in the significant events, of which they knew to report.”²⁹⁶ However, even though they chose to incorporate this folk hero, now elevated to the status of a deity, into their epic, the results could not be very satisfactory. As Oldenberg told it, the central narrative of the epic was concerned with “a battle between warring cousins.”²⁹⁷ The introduction of Kṛṣṇa into this epic, especially in the crucial scene of the Bhagavadgītā where Arjuna asks him to station his chariot between the two armies, had something out of place about it: “How peculiar,” Oldenberg wrote, “these theosophic teachings at *such* a moment, this sudden silencing of the noise of battle in the face of a mystic otherworldly stillness.”²⁹⁸ Recalling Holtzmann’s ideas of an original epic encounter between two heroes, he therefore proposed that the Bhagavadgītā must have originally been a much shorter poem, tailored to the exigencies of the epic situation:

Indeed, it seems, in fact, that the dialogue of the two was originally much shorter, and was more directly concerned with the single question of whether Arjuna would do the right thing by fighting. Only later did one add at this point the main portion of the Bhagavadgītā as it now exists including further additions that accrued to it: not a poem that originally existed independently, but was composed for precisely this passage in the epic.²⁹⁹

In time, however, this poem underwent a reworking as the Brahmins felt compelled to offer some form of ethical justification for Arjuna’s actions. Notes Oldenberg, “God’s closest friend was about to perform deeds along with him that appeared to be a major

295. *Ibid.*, 42–43.

296. *Ibid.*, 43.

297. *Ibid.*, 3.

298. *Ibid.*, 71 (Oldenberg’s emphasis).

299. *Ibid.*

sin to the strict morals of many. That required a justification.” Since it was precisely Kṛṣṇa, the spokesperson or the figurehead of the new cult, who was endowed the task of offering such a justification “in philosophical contemplation,” it was also “understandable that the Kṛṣṇa faith—one can say, the faith of the Bhāgavata sect—used this opportunity to present his essence, to strengthen his claim with all [possible] emphasis here within this epic.”³⁰⁰

By premising his reconstruction of the Bhagavadgītā on a theory of the divinization of Kṛṣṇa, Oldenberg was able to evade judgment on the pantheism controversy and yet enter the “original Gītā” debate with a “critical” stance. But while he overtly rejected Garbe’s reconstruction, he actually reinstated almost every aspect of the latter’s theory of a historical evolution of the Bhagavadgītā—albeit now embedded at a deeper level of the text. Whereas Garbe had made use of an extrinsic framework to explain the Gītā’s form, Oldenberg, by resorting to a theory of euhemerization, was able to embed the Gītā’s supposed evolution in the very process of composition itself. In place of Garbe’s narrative of a theistic Gītā with later pantheistic elements, he was able to offer an account of the Gītā that could make sense of both its theistic and pantheistic moments by pointing to different ways in which Kṛṣṇa had been regarded throughout history. Since Kṛṣṇa had aspects of a human, a hero, and a god, his interpretation of the Bhagavadgītā was fully capable of accounting for differences in the text without having to resort to a theory of its progressive infiltration by pantheistic doctrines. As he argued against Garbe, it was possible that the sources the Gītā’s poet relied on were already of a composite nature. There was neither a pure Sāṃkhya nor a pure Yoga; instead, Oldenberg advocated that the yogic doctrines of the poem had themselves been modulated so as to lead up to the worship of Kṛṣṇa. This Kṛṣṇa, furthermore, was not simply the folk god of a popular cult; he was already a composite of the minor divinity and the Brahmanic Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa. One did not need to seek an external explanation for the Bhagavadgītā’s manifold doctrines; the reason for its composite appearance was rooted in the history of religions itself.

RESISTANCES TO MODERNITY

This radical historicization of faith would not be without its discontents. Some of the earliest voices of protest would come from within Protestant theology itself. One such voice would be the Evangelical theologian Rudolf Otto (1869–1937), who in numerous works such as *Das Heilige* (*The Idea of the Holy*) contested the reigning orthodoxy of his time.³⁰¹ As Otto also took a stance on the original Gītā in three

300. Ibid.

301. Rudolf Otto, *Das Heilige: Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen* (Breslau: Trewendt und Granier, 1917), translated into English by John W. Harvey as *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923).

books published between 1934 and 1935, his views are relevant to our review of the German Gītā here. Before we take a look at his ideas of the Bhagavadgītā, however, let us first consider his views on historicism.

Born September 25, 1869, into a family of conservative Lutherans, Otto initially studied theology in Erlangen. After receiving a doctorate for a dissertation on Luther in 1898, he turned his attention to a defense of personal religious experience against naturalistic and historicist currents. (Looking back at these years, Otto reported being disturbed even as a child by unorthodox currents: “In school, in the church and at home I was raised in the forms of traditional orthodoxy [Strenggläubigkeit] and this type of faith appeared to me not only best, but also the only one. . . . [N]ow while in school we began to hear of innovations and innovators, who barging into theology, shattering its foundations: dazzling [us] with their methods and leading [us] away from the old truth. . . . I wanted to acquire the methods for defense from men of the old school.”³⁰²) An early work, *Naturalistische und religiöse Weltansicht*,³⁰³ was dedicated to a defense of religion against scientific naturalism by distinguishing between two equal but fundamentally distinct perspectives, the naturalistic and idealistic. The main target of Otto’s criticism in this early stage was the evolutionary theories of Darwin, but by the time he published his later works *Kantische-Fries’sche Anthropologie* and *Das Heilige*, his intellectual horizon had broadened. Alongside scientific naturalism, he now began to see historicism as the main threat to his discipline. Gooch, for instance, argues that “Otto’s Neo-Friesian position is best understood as a reaction to historicism, where that term refers both to the general relativization of cultural norms as a result of the accumulation of historical knowledge in the nineteenth century; and, more specifically, to Troeltsch’s attempt in *Absolutheit des Christentums* to establish normative means by undertaking an a posteriori comparison of the great historical formations within the religious history of mankind.”³⁰⁴ Against the background of these historicist movements, Otto sought to demonstrate the existence of a faculty of religious sentiment in man independent of its historical manifestations. As he put it in his foreword to *Kantische-Fries’sche Anthropologie*:

Like all history of spirit, the history of religion too is a history of the development and unfolding and impact of inclinations and capacities of the rational human spirit. And its history will become clear to us [only] to the extent that the essence of this spirit itself, its inclinations and their relationship to each other and the manner of their reciprocal effects, becomes clear to us [as well].³⁰⁵

302. Rudolf Otto, “Vita zum I. Examen [1891/92],” cited in R. Boeke, “Rudolf Otto, Leben und Werke,” *Numen* 14, no. 2 (1967): 131–32.

303. Rudolf Otto, *Naturalistische und religiöse Weltansicht*, PhD diss., University of Tübingen, 1905, simultaneously published as *Naturalistische und religiöse Weltansicht* (Tübingen: H. Laupp, 1905).

304. Todd A. Gooch, *The Numinous and Modernity: An Interpretation of Rudolf Otto’s Philosophy of Religion* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2000), 75.

305. Rudolf Otto, *Kantische-Fries’sche Anthropologie und ihre Anwendung auf die Theologie. Zur Einleitung in die Glaubenslehre für Studenten der Theologie* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1909).

In the same work, Otto also noted that “supernaturalism and historicism fail to supply a measure and a principle of the truth in religion. The history of religions [Religionsgeschichte] expands into titanic dimensions. But how does it hope to mature from a mere description of religion into a science of religion, if it is nothing but a history of religions [Religionsgeschichte]. . . . Indeed, how can it even be a history of religions, unless one does not first possess, even if in dim outline, a principle in oneself according to which we [are able to] select the historical subject matter to say nothing of its classification?”³⁰⁶ The solution, for Otto, lay in identifying a “*spiritus sanctus in corde*,” an intuition of the holy spirit within the heart.³⁰⁷ Based on this idea of an innate knowledge of the holy (which, under the influence of Kant’s language, itself mediated via Troeltsch’s notion of the “religious a priori,” he also described as the “religious a priori”³⁰⁸), Otto argued that history of religions was insufficient to properly understand the phenomenon of religious life. To begin with, it was insufficient as a science:

The science of religion [Religionswissenschaft] is not the description of religion, as little as jurisprudence [Rechtswissenschaft] is the description of an extant law or of laws in general. Jurisprudence seeks to determine the validity of law and the valid law [in a particular case]. In this goal, legal history is only a means to an end for it. [Similarly,] [t]he science of religion seeks [to determine] the validity of religion and the valid religion. Since, for historical-critical reasons and for reasons [lying] in religion itself, it is denied a recourse to supernatural criteria, it must proceed like moral, legal and, in general, like all human sciences [Geisteswissenschaft].³⁰⁹

But Otto’s critique was not restricted to the simple observation that in order to be able to recognize the phenomena of religious life (to say nothing of being able to study them) we need a principle. Rather, in focusing upon historical manifestations of the religious feeling, the history of religions had gone astray. It had missed out on a

viii. (The foreword is not reprinted in the English translation, Rudolf Otto, *The Philosophy of Religion based on Kant and Fries*, trans. E. B. Dicker [New York: Richard R. Smith, 1931], which features a foreword by W. Tudor Jones instead. Due to weaknesses in the English translation, we have preferred to translate from the German throughout rather than make use of Dicker’s edition.)

306. Otto, *Kantische-Fries’sche Anthropologie*, 3.

307. For the origins of this expression in Otto’s dissertation on Luther’s doctrine of the intuition of the Holy Spirit, see Gooch, *The Numinous and Modernity*, 73–77. Gooch rightly points to the origins of this doctrine in a “specific, historically localizable tradition” and argues for seeing Otto’s later thought as “transpos[ing]” “this Lutheran doctrine . . . onto the history of religion as a whole” with the “*testimonium spiritus sanctum internum*” conceived of as a kind of “general capacity for recognizing the holy in history (DH 174), and for distinguishing the relative validity of individual manifestations of the holy.” *Ibid.*, 76.

308. On the emergence and popularization of this term in a spectrum of nineteenth-century authors, among them Troeltsch and Otto, see Mark D. Chapman, *Ernst Troeltsch and Liberal Theology: Religion and Cultural Synthesis in Wilhelmine Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

309. Otto, *Kantische-Fries’sche Anthropologie*, 193.

more fundamental domain, a domain that was the wellspring of all religious experience and, as such, had to be presupposed in all positivistic researches into the phenomenon of religion. Adopting a term from Fries, Otto called this stage of primitive experience the domain of "Ahnung" (a "foreboding" or an "intimation").³¹⁰ As the "epistemological mode of 'unmediated knowledge'" (Kleeberg), *Ahnung* (or *Ahnung* as it was more commonly spelled after the early nineteenth century) corresponded to the most fundamental intuition of the holy in man. Following Fries (for whom it delineated the basic domain of experience for knowledge of the eternal³¹¹), Otto argued that *Ahnung* offered a basic domain for experience and analysis of spiritual existence. According to him, "[caught] in the power of obscure feelings of the beautiful and the sublime in all its forms in natural and spiritual life, we have an immediate understanding of the eternal in the temporal and of the temporal as a manifestation of the eternal." "Distinctly and positively, albeit inexpressibly," he declared, "the world of faith announces itself in the world of knowledge through 'Ahnung'."³¹²

In his later work *Das Heilige*, he would repeat this call for analyzing the phenomenon of religious life out of a domain of "principles a priori, which no experience and no 'history' can give."³¹³ In his opinion, the history of religions, which focused merely upon identifying and categorizing different forms of religious life, was insufficient to answer the question of what religion was or whence it arose. Concretely, what was required alongside the empirical study of religion was a philosophy and a psychology of religion, or, rather, a philosophy of religion that ultimately went over into a psychology of religion. Moreover, as the science of religion, history of religions had fundamentally missed its aim if it thought it could rest content with the mere taxonomic classification of religious phenomena. Like "all human sciences," it was first and foremost an experience of formation of consciousness. Thus, while history of religion proceeded from the insight into the innate disposition toward religion in every human being, insofar as it was a human science, its object was not distinct from history of religions itself. Otto thus essentially overcame the deadend of historical consciousness. On the one hand, history of religions had to recognize the process of evolution in history. But, on the other, he was taking the discipline itself back into history, making it a part of the very same evolution it claimed to study. As such, it aimed not only at "understanding religion in its historical manifestation and

310. Rudolf Otto, "Wissen, Glaube und Ahnung," *Die Christliche Welt* 48 (1908): 818–22. The title plays on a work of the same title by Fries (Jakob Friedrich Fries, *Wissen, Glaube und Ahnung* [Jena: J. C. G. Götterdt, 1805]).

311. As Kleeberg puts it, "For Fries, to believe meant to deny all limitations on knowledge, while *Ahnung* formed a necessary prerequisite for real scientific knowledge, since it was 'the feeling that the eternal was reflected, albeit in an imperfect and restricted manner, in the finite.' Hence, *Ahnung* showed that causal explanations were comprised within a realm of *absolute* causes, which the beauty and harmony of nature reflected." Bernhard Kleeberg, "The Will to Meaning: Protestant Reactions to Darwinism in Nineteenth-Century Germany," in *Nature and Scripture in the Abrahamic Religions, 1700–Present*, vol. 1, ed. Jitse M. van der Meer and Scott Mandelbrote (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2008), 267.

312. Otto, *Kantische-Fries'sche Anthropologie*, 83.

313. Otto, *Das Heilige*, 206.

multiplicity, its comparison and evaluation, criticism, clarification,” but also, “when possible,” it aimed at its “further development.”³¹⁴ In fact, it became “a technique for the formation [Bildung] of religion and the religious community.”³¹⁵ A further consequence of this Neo-Kantian approach to faith was that theology no longer had to be “a supernaturally intuited physics and metaphysics of heavenly objects.” Rather, as the “science of religion,” it could aim both at theoretical knowledge and at “the practical exercise and care of religion.”³¹⁶

In critiquing the historians of religion for their emphasis on empirical research, Otto was discretely trying to return theological questions to the center of the search for different forms of religious life. (As Gooch imagines it, in *Das Heilige* Otto is engaged in an interior conversation with German audiences, which runs as follows: “religion is not at all what you have come to think of it as being. It is not merely the refuge of those weak-minded, stodgy, moralistic people who are its most visible representatives. Indeed, it is the highest aspiration of all truly passionate and creative individuals. And once you have seen what religion *really* is, you need not, indeed, you cannot, despise it.”³¹⁷) The real aim of Otto’s argument, however, was not simply to reconcile faith with history. Rather, he wished to do so under the sign of a specific faith, namely, Christianity. As Gooch notes, Otto’s claim that “the capacity to recognize the holy in its appearances (the *sensus numinis*) undergoes a process of education in the course of history, similar to the education of taste (the *sensus communis*) described by Kant in the *Third Critique*, whereby ‘false’ applications of the category of the holy are gradually recognized and rejected” has direct consequences for Christian theology. In his assessment,

Das Heilige...proposes a solution to the theological impasse produced by historicism. Otto wants to show, without appealing to supernatural causality, 1) that Christ is the supreme manifestation of the holy, 2) that the *experience* of Christ as a revelation of the holy is still possible for modern persons, 3) that the religious significance of Christ is still the same today as it was for the original Christian community, and 4) that these conclusions are immune to “the accidental fluctuation of exegetical results and the torment of historical justifications.”³¹⁸

Das Heilige was thus as much a contribution to the historical grounding of a specific faith as it was a philosophical grounding of the idea of faith in general. Born out of Otto’s specific experiences, it was nonetheless an attempt to locate those experiences within a broader epistemological and historical narrative.³¹⁹ And though

314. Otto, *Kantische-Fries’sche Anthropologie*, 84.

315. Ibid.

316. Ibid.

317. Gooch, *The Numinous and Modernity*, 210 (emphasis in original).

318. Ibid., 22.

319. For Otto’s firsthand account of his experience of the holy, see later. Ernst Benz also reports that Otto recounted such an experience to him, an experience “granted... primarily not through the lecture of holy texts, but as a spontaneous religious experience in a Jewish synagogue.” Ernst Benz, “Rudolf Otto als Theologe und Persönlichkeit,” in *Rudolf Otto’s Bedeutung für die Religionswissenschaft und die Theologie heute*, ed. Ernst Benz (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 36.

Otto tried to give his work the appearance of cosmopolitanism, journeying to India, China, and Japan to investigate those countries' ideas of faith, his overarching outlook remained peculiarly parochial. "Otto's political and theological views emerge from a typically German vision: cultivation [Bildung], especially the cultivation of a personality, which attains its high point in the study of ethical-religious worldviews and the history of religions. This cultivation is the source of all true freedom, for it develops the good will and the religious experience of the individual."³²⁰

In spite of his conservative outlook, however, Otto was far from advocating a return to the exegetic tradition. On the contrary—and here one sees the deepest influence of Luther on his thought—he wished to make a personal experience of the divine the centerpiece of his restitution of theology. As Alles puts it, "the starting-point and aim of [his] analysis of the holy is the numinous experience of infinity which human speech can hardly express."³²¹ In the fourth chapter of *Das Heilige*, via a reference to the mystic Gerhard Teerstegen (1697–1769), Otto attempted to develop the essence of this experience in terms of what he called the "*mysterium tremendum*." Distinguishing the mysterious object from all "subsequent 'rationalizations'," ³²² he argued that "the truly 'mysterious' object is ungraspable and incomprehensible [ungreifbar und unbegreifbar] not only because my knowledge has certain limits that cannot be overcome but because I here encounter 'something completely other' that in its kind and essence is incommensurable with my essence and before which I therefore recoil in awestruck amazement."³²³ But albeit the numinous experience refuses itself to speech, Otto thought that it could be analyzed in terms of three moments:

1. "The moment of the 'tremendum'."³²⁴
2. "The moment of the overpowering ('majestas')."³²⁵
3. "The moment of the 'energetic' [Energischen]."³²⁶

For the first of these, Otto preferentially cited examples from the Old Testament. Thus, he noted that the Hebrew *hqdsh* (which he translated as "heilig" or "holy") contained the essence of what he meant with "tremendum." The Old Testament, he argued, was "especially rich in parallel expressions for this feeling." Citing Exodus 23:27 and Job 9:34 and 13:21, he argued that "the *emat Yahweh*, the 'divine terror' [Gottesschrecken], that Yahweh can radiate, indeed, unleash [upon humans]" constituted a paradigmatic example of the "tremendum."³²⁷ Otto placed this feeling at the lowest scale of religious sentiment. "From it," he argued, "and from its first

320. Gregory D. Alles, "Rudolf Otto (1869–1937)," in *Klassiker der Religionswissenschaft. Von Friedrich Schleiermacher bis Mircea Eliade*, ed. Axel Michaels (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1997), 203.

321. *Ibid.*, 204.

322. Otto, *Das Heilige*, 30.

323. *Ibid.*, 31.

324. *Ibid.*, 14–21.

325. *Ibid.*, 22–25.

326. *Ibid.*, 25–27.

327. *Ibid.*, 15.

emergence in the minds of primordial humanity, all religious historical development has proceeded.”³²⁸ This “numinous awe” he further claimed is the “genuine characteristic of the so-called ‘religions of the primitives’ in the form of ‘demonic dread’ as a naïve, crude, and first stimulus.”³²⁹ However, beyond the *tremendum* that denoted the “absolute unapproachability” (of God), Otto argued that “another moment must supervene in order to exhaust it [the concept of *mysterium*] completely: the moment of ‘power’, ‘force’, ‘overwhelming force’, ‘absolute overwhelming force’.” Adopting the term “majestas” for this feeling, Otto argued that “the moment of the *tremendum* is then more fully described as ‘tremenda majestas’.”³³⁰ Under the latter concept, he subsumed phenomena such as Schleiermacher’s idea of a feeling of dependence and the mystic’s experience of loss of selfhood. (In fact, Otto regarded “identification with the transcendent” as that which is “in terms of power and reality absolutely superior, [and hence,] simultaneously irrational”³³¹ to be the defining characteristic of the mystical experience.) Finally, he also included a third characteristic under the concept of *mysterium*, which he circumscribed with expressions such as “vitality, passion, emotional being, will, strength, movement, arousal, activity, and drive.”³³² Arguing that the energetic was “the moment that has everywhere generated the most and strongest protest against the ‘philosophical’ God of merely rational speculation and definition,” he argued for seeing “Luther’s ‘omnipotentia dei’ in his ‘De servo arbitrio’ as nothing but the combination of ‘majestas’ as the absolute superiority with this ‘energy’ as a restless and all-encompassing drive, [as] activity, conquest, and life.”³³³ The numinous experience was thus properly characterized as a *mysterium* that was *tremendum* or awe-inspiring, *majestas* or overwhelming in its force or power, and, finally, as energetic or enlivened. To this tripartite characterization, Otto also added a further (superordinate) characterization. According to him, the *mysterium* was not only characterized by the “moment of the repellent *tremendum* with the ‘majestas’... It is manifestly at the same time also peculiarly *attractive*, involving, *fascinating*, which, together with the repellent moment of the *tremendum* creates an oddly contrasting harmony.”³³⁴ Calling this “the strangest and most significant phenomenon of all in the history of religion,” he argued that “as horrific and fearful as the demonic-divine can appear to the mind, so enticing and attractive is it at the same time.” “For it, the *mysterium*, is not simply the miraculous [Wunderbare], it is also the marvellous [Wundervolle].”³³⁵

Although Otto analyzed the *mysterium* in terms of four moments, it was clear from his discussion that two of these took precedence for him over all others. Correctly formulated, *mysterium* did not refer to just any mystery, but to that mystery which

328. Ibid., 16.

329. Ibid., 18.

330. Ibid., 22.

331. Ibid., 24–25 (Otto’s emphasis).

332. Ibid., 25.

333. Ibid., 26.

334. Ibid., 39 (Otto’s emphasis).

335. Ibid., 39.

provoked awe in the witness. Thus, its full name, as Otto made clear, was actually *mysterium tremendum*.³³⁶ In his words, “the epithet *tremendum* indicated, first and foremost, the positive ‘How’ of the matter.”³³⁷ Thus, properly speaking, *tremendum* was not simply a “moment” in the mystery, but constituted its essence. It is what set apart the divine mystery from all other (lesser) mysteries. Likewise, he placed the moment of the *fascinosum* on the same level as the *mysterium tremendum* itself. *Fascinosum* was not a subordinate moment, but a parallel aspect of the latter including its lesser moments such as *majestas*. As he put it in the chapter titled “Analogies” (summing up the results of the investigation of the preceding chapter on “The Fascinosum”), “in order to adequately describe this second aspect of the numinous, we had to add to the ‘mysterium tremendum’ from on high that it is simultaneously an absolute fascinosum. And in this infinitely *horrifying* which is simultaneously the infinitely *marvellous*, the *mysterium* has its own *positive* content, which announces itself to the sentiment.”³³⁸ The *mysterium tremendum* (*fascinosum*) constituted the essence of the religious experience, to which on the subjective side corresponded the “*testimonium spiritus sanctum internum*.” When these two came together, when “alongside the inner revelation [Offenbarung] out of the spirit there was the outer revelation [Offenbarung] of the divine,” then one could speak truly of the “manifestation [Erscheinung] [and not just an intimation] of the holy.”³³⁹

A REVELATION AND A MYSTERY

Though better known as a theologian, Otto was also a scholar of religion. Indeed, his anthropological approach to religion practically required some knowledge of other religious traditions, since many of his claims about the innate nature of the religious instinct or drive in man were actually empirical claims, based on the observation of the universality of the phenomenon of religion. Nonetheless, he was far from renouncing the claim (to priority) of theology. As he put it in the foreword to his first book on Indian religions, the goal of his book was “not ‘Indological’ or ‘religion historical’ [religionsgeschichtlich], but rather ‘religion informative’ [religionskundlich].” “As a *theologian*,” he wrote, “I am interested in this religious formation and the theologian may not let himself be preempted or overtaken by anyone in [the task of] grasping such a noble growth [i.e., Hinduism] in the purest form possible and of giving it space to unfold its innermost essence without hinderance.”³⁴⁰ Otto thus saw a parity between the history of religions and theology. In his opinion, the two disciplines were related fields—the former providing positivistic researches to the latter, the latter providing ultimate meaning and clarification to the former—but neither

336. Ibid., 13.

337. Ibid., 14 (quotation marks the authors’ addition).

338. Ibid., 52 (Otto’s emphasis).

339. Ibid., 169.

340. Rudolf Otto, *Vischnu-Nārāyana: Texte zur indischen Gottesmystik I* (Jena: Diederich, 1917), 7 (Otto’s emphasis).

able to claim precedence over the other. Indeed, insofar as the theologian was interested in gathering materials (and in this task, he could not permit himself to be led by the historians of religion, but had to carry out his own researches), he conducted himself too as a scholar of religion. But, and this was crucial to Otto, whereas the scholars of religion were content with identifying religious plurality (leading to religious relativism), the theologian could not rest content with constating the existence of relative notions of value. Indeed, for the reasons examined above, this was logically and empirically impossible. Thus, while the theologian's (positivistic) researches were to lay "the groundwork for a comparison and a mutual evaluation of value and superiority," these things, according to Otto, could not "influence the presentation itself."³⁴¹ Questions of value were to enter later.

Among the many religions Otto studied, none seems to have been as important to him as Hinduism. In all he published twelve books on Hinduism, including five translations³⁴² and one edited volume.³⁴³ In the same year as *Das Heilige* appeared, he published the volume *Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa: Texte zur indischen Gottesmystik* containing selections from the Mahābhārata (above all, the Śvetadvīpa episode from the Nārāyaṇīya) and other texts. At the center of this book, however, stood his interest in understanding the parallels between Christianity and Hinduism (more specifically, that subset of it associated with the worship of Viṣṇu)—parallels he took as evidence of "the inner kinship of the religious urge and its expressions in man as such."³⁴⁴ Motivated by a desire to understand this universal desire and convinced that Vaiṣṇavism offered the closest analogue to Christianity,³⁴⁵ Otto undertook to present some central texts of the Vaiṣṇava tradition accompanied by a commentary.

341. Ibid.

342. In addition to the aforementioned *Viṣṇu Nārāyaṇa: Texte zur indischen Gottesmystik I*, translations of Rāmanuja's Siddhānta (*Siddhānta des Rāmanuja: Texte zur indischen Gottesmystik II* [Jena: E. Diederich, 1917]), Śrīnivāsa's Yatindramatadīpikā (*Dīpikā des Nivāsa. Eine indische Heilslehre* [Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1916]), the Kaṭha Upaniṣad (*Die Kaṭha Upaniṣad. Übertragen und erläutert* [Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1936]), and of course the translation of the Bhagavadgītā.

343. Rudolf Otto, ed. *Rabindranath Tagore's Bekenntnis* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1931). The other volumes were: *Christianity and the Indian Religion of Grace* (Madras: Christian Literature Society for India, 1928), *Die Gnadenreligion Indiens und das Christentum* (Gotha: L. Klotz, 1930) (a revised, expanded version of the 1928 text), *Gottheit und Gottheiten der Arier* (Giessen: A. Töpelmann, 1932), *Varuna-Hymnen des Rig-Veda*. Vol. 1 of *Religionsgeschichtliche Texte*, ed. Gustav Mensching (Bonn: Ludwig Röhrscheid 1948), and the two books on the Bhagavadgītā already cited. To this list, one could also add his *West-Östliche Mystik. Vergleich und Unterscheidung zur Wesensdeutung* (Leipzig: Leopold Klotz, 1926), a comparison of Śaṅkara and Meister Eckhart.

344. Otto, *Viṣṇu Nārāyaṇa*, 4.

345. Initially, Otto argued that "the analogy" between Christianity and Vaiṣṇavism "consist[ed] solely in the fact that it, too, [i.e., Vaiṣṇavism] is a *salvific religion* [*Erlösungsreligion*] in the strictest sense of the word." "To find *salvation* [*Heil*]," he wrote, "specifically, other worldly and transcendental salvation [*Heil*] is the entire goal of the religion." But, then, noting that this was the goal of "all other religions of India too," he argued that the "further and specific analogy" of Vaiṣṇavism to Christianity was its "highly developed *theistic* concept of God. Furthermore, its doctrine of salvation as experienced and received through the *grace* [*Gnade*] of divinity. [And furthermore its doctrine of] *salvific*

In this early work, Otto did not focus specifically on the Bhagavadgītā.³⁴⁶ In his foreword, he referred the reader to Garbe's edition. In a summary that clearly betrays the influence of Garbe's work, he noted:

The Gītā, as it is present to us today, is a text in which the religion of a strictly personal god and of the faithful surrender to him in [the attitude of] Bhakti are peculiarly mixed and crossed with the theomonism and the 'Advaita' of Upanishadic speculation and which is simultaneously combined with the emergent systems of Sāṅkhya and Yoga. But Garbe has made it highly probable in his introduction to [his edition of] the Gītā that the present Gītā came about when an older, simpler, and more more equivocal work was defaced by insertions from Vedic priestly theology and changes in the text itself.³⁴⁷

But while Otto adopted Garbe's thesis of an earlier theistic Gītā corrupted by pantheistic interpolations, he was interested in it only as it furthered his own ideas of the origins of Vaiṣṇavism. Thus, prior to his résumé of Garbe's views, he argued that "we still possess obscure information about very old religious and cultic communities, for whom Vishnu, Nārāyaṇa, Bhagavant or similar types of divinities were a god, perhaps even before he acquired the theological honor of [being] Brahman: [information] about the Sātavatas, Vaikhānasas, Bhāgavatas, Pāñcarātras, the Krishna worshippers, among others." Placing the origins of these groups "even before the appearance of Buddha and the literature of the Upanishads," Otto argued that "Vishnu-Nārāyaṇa then invaded these at an early date and was glorified in a number of them [the reference is not clear, perhaps he means the Upanishads]." Further, he took "control" of the "great epics of India, the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata" and "soon, perhaps already in the second century before Christ, his veneration attained a remarkable majesty and clarity." "For here," wrote Otto, "arises the Bhagavad-Gītā = 'the doctrinal poem of the Sublime One' that is embedded in the Mahābhārata, the holiest text of all Vaishnavas and simultaneously of all faithful Hindus everywhere."³⁴⁸

Otto's thesis of the Bhagavadgītā's emergence was more complex than Garbe's. Although he shared the latter's suspicion of a pantheistic (or, rather, as he called it, a monistic) revision of the original Gītā, he was more interested in developing a

bliss [Heilsgut] as union with God." "For," he clarified, "the Vishnu religion too tends toward mysticism, but its mysticism is 'god mysticism' [Gottesmystik], theistic mysticism, and is thus distinguished as such from the impersonal mysticism of the strict Advaita doctrine." To this, Otto also added one final point of "analogy to Christianity": "its religious basic functions as 'Bhakti', which means *faithful and devoted surrender* [Glaubens- und Liebes-Hingabe], and as 'Prapatti', which means an *equanimity* [Gelassenheit] that disposes of all personal work." Ibid., 5–6 (all italics Otto's).

346. But see the footnote in his *Das Heilige*, where he notes that "nowhere can the irrational moment of 'ὁργή' [passion or frenzy] be better studied than in this [eleventh] chapter of the Bhagavadgītā that belongs among the indisputably classic [examples] of religious doctrine." Otto, *Das Heilige*, 77, n. 1.

347. Otto, *Vischnu Nārāyaṇa*, 16.

348. Ibid.

thesis of the poem's evolution as a foil for his own ideas of religious development than in the *Gītā* itself. Garbe's work, for him, represented an example of what could be achieved through "philological textual purification": "a text of great simplicity and beauty with the primitive traits of a primitive religion, which might have quite likely existed at first as a tribal religion." But its real value lay in what it revealed about the universal (and uniform) development of religion across the globe. Arguing that "the development here [i.e., in the *Bhagavadgītā*]," "would not have been dissimilar to that on Semitic and, especially, Israeli terrain (the Egyptian, too, offers parallels),"³⁴⁹ Otto declared:

It is not a perfected monotheism that stands at the beginning [of the history of religions], but the cult of a tribal god, who is to be worshipped by this tribe as *its* God and exclusively so, which does not rule out that other tribes and peoples have their own respective god, but who is nonetheless the 'sole God' for *his* people and, as such, a 'zealous' and that means, a 'jealous' God, who demands from his followers 'one-pointedness', namely his exclusive worship and worship as the highest [god], as does Yahweh from [the people of] Israel.³⁵⁰

Originating as the tribal god of a small people, Yahweh according to Otto was nonetheless capable of attaining the status of the highest god. "This god," he wrote, "then grows to become the universal God, the God of gods, God in the genuine and exclusive sense. And this takes place through prophetic experience and prophetic 'founding' [of a religion]."³⁵¹ And then, making it clear that he transferred this development one-to-one on to the Indian context, he wrote:

What Echnaton wished to do for Egypt, what Moses did for Israel, that is what Krishna probably achieved for the tribe of the *Sātvatas*: like Moses, tribal chief and prophet in one person, but simultaneously upon his death a deified hero who is worshipped as the 'avatāra' of the God, whom he himself announced—a process that repeats itself in India unto this day.³⁵²

And then, concluding, he drew the discussion back to the *Gītā*: "Krishna's annunciation, however, and the annunciation of Krishna would then be that 'authentic' core and genuine foundation of the *Gītā* [which the Western researchers had sought]."³⁵³

In essential respects, then, Otto's account of *Vaiṣṇavism* replicated essential features of the story Orientalists had recounted about Judaism. (Otto does not cite his sources, so it is difficult to say whom he specifically relies upon.) A tribal god, a cult hero, a religious founder, *Kṛṣṇa* arose through prophetic declaration (or, exaggeration) to become the sole God of a monotheistic faith, based on ideas of exclusivity

349. *Ibid.* (punctuation modified).

350. *Ibid.*, 16–17 (all emphasis Otto's).

351. *Ibid.*, 17.

352. *Ibid.*

353. *Ibid.*

and universality. But the parallels to Judaism and, ultimately, to Christianity did not end there. Otto wrote:

Soon after this high point, the Vishnu religion including all other Vedic sister-confessions faltered before the powerful flood of heresy. Buddhists, the followers of Buddha, and Jainas, the followers of Jina, dominated the field for many centuries in India. But Vishnu did not die out. And, from approximately the 5th century onwards, Śiva and Vishnu, with ever greater success, pushed back the heretic usurpers.³⁵⁴

Holtzmann had already explored the history of the subcontinent in terms of a religious conflict between Brahmanism and the “heretical” Buddhism. But, although he used this predicate of the Buddhists, it was clear that, for him, it was in fact Brahmanism that was the heretical faith, imposing itself upon the Indo-Germanic Buddhist tradition. If the heretic faith could ultimately claim the title of orthodoxy that was only because of the weakness of the true faith, a state of affairs that could only be corrected through the work of the Western critics. Thus, when Otto entered the scene, there was already precedent for regarding the history of religions of India in terms of Western categories and experiences. Otto, however, did not share Holtzmann’s Indo-Germanic fantasy (although he did have a similar fascination with “Āryan” civilization).³⁵⁵ In the story he told, Vaiṣṇavaism was essentially analogous to Christianity, a stunning example of the universality of the religious sentiment across cultures. Not only were the two similar in that they were both “*salvific religions* [*Erlösungsreligion*],” but there was also a series of further and more specific parallels connecting them. Both had a “highly developed *theistic* concept of God”; both held that “salvation [was] experienced and received through the *grace* [*Gnade*] of divinity”; both saw “*salvific bliss* [*Heilsgut*] [to lie in] union with God.”³⁵⁶ “In its immediacy and plasticity,” wrote Otto, Vaiṣṇavism offered “a practically thrilling example for the law of parallels on the different arenas and fields of religious development [in the world].”³⁵⁷ But which Christianity was Vaiṣṇavism constructed to parallel?

If, for Holtzmann, Brahmanism was the symbol of a decaying, corrupt church and Buddhism of an aborted Enlightenment, Otto reversed this evaluation. Lacking Holtzmann’s obsession with a shared Indo-Germanic heritage, he did not have to resort to the latter’s historical perversion. Instead, the story he told of Vaiṣṇavism (which, we must remember, represented for him the archetype of all Indian religions) was more complex and, in a way, “truer” to events (that is to say, closer to

354. Ibid.

355. See his *Gottheiten der Arier*, already cited. In this strange little book, Otto tries to demonstrate how the gods of the “Āryan” people arose from the feeling of awe before natural forces, not however insofar as they were “perceived to be ensouled” but insofar as they were “perceived to be numinous.” Ibid., 4. There can be no better example of how the autodidacticism endemic to German scholarship since Luther led it down the garden-path.

356. Otto, *Viṣṇu Nārāyaṇa*, 5–6 (Otto’s italics).

357. Ibid., 4.

actual events in the history of Christianity) First, he compared the period of threat to Vaiṣṇavism from schismatic movements to the medieval ages. Thus, noting that during this period (i.e., when “Buddhists...and Jainas...dominated the field...in India”), “the [scholarly] production did not come to a rest,” he argued that this was the “age of the Purāṇas and Āgamas and Samhitas, the holy verses, songs, and collections of songs, of the ritual and law books” that laid “the foundation for the periods of the higher scholastic education [höheren schulmäßigen Lehrbildung].”³⁵⁸ To be sure, Otto did not view this period entirely positively. It represented “a period of transition” during which “myth proliferated luxuriantly” and would need to be shorn back. It was also a period when “the instincts and superstitions of the vulgar segments [of society], the naïve minor religions, the mythology and magic of the Śāktas formed disorderly connections with elements of the older classical speculation” and would thus require a purification. Indeed, underscoring his assessment of this phase as a mere “period of transition,” Otto wrote that it was “simultaneously a period of the urge and the preparation for victory and to a new ascent to something higher and more pure.” “This then occurred successfully with the great Vaishnava *Reformation* in the eleventh and twelfth centuries....”³⁵⁹ But before this could occur, an upsurge of devotional feeling within the Vaiṣṇava church itself was required.

As Otto saw it, the Vaiṣṇava Reformation of the eleventh and twelfth centuries had to battle not only Buddhist and Jaina heterodoxy, but also a tendency toward speculation and mysticism within the order itself. Imperiled by the heretic sects on the one side, the medieval period was also the age of the proliferation of the great monistic sects. Inspired by the “Buddhist speculation about the ‘emptiness’ of all things,” Otto argued, Śāṃkara set out to formulate his ideas of “the strict ‘non-duality of Brahman’ in connection with the doctrine of illusion [Scheinlehre].” This development “cast its shadows over the theistic speculations and literature as well, as the later and interpolated parts of the *Gītā* demonstrate, [and] attained a dominant position [in society].”³⁶⁰ Although ultimately “victorious over Buddhism,” this resurgent monistic Vaiṣṇavism remained “initially and primarily a religion of the speculators, the scholarly and the wise.” It was only later, Otto argued, as it was “swept over by its theistic competitors” that “a conscious and keen battle against the opponent got underway.”³⁶¹ Otto wrote:

Instead of the atmosphere of compromise and average connections there now arose a clear and sharp insight into the fundamental difference in terms of inclination and content of the two religious outlooks. A passionate reaction of true, strong feeling for God [Gottesgefühls] and faith in God [Gottesglaubens] erupted against the mists of impersonal mysticism, a rebellion against the clutch of the foreign elements of the doctrine of illusion that had wrapped themselves around one’s own tradition and innate devotion. And out of this reaction resulted the great age of the Vaishnava

358. *Ibid.*, 17.

359. *Ibid.* (Otto’s italics).

360. *Ibid.*, 87.

361. *Ibid.*

Reformation, which, beginning four centuries before our own [Reformation], was completed by the twelfth century.³⁶²

But this Reformation, according to Otto, “did not just mean a triumphant advance of the truer faith in God vis-à-vis impersonal mysticism.”³⁶³ On the contrary. It “simultaneously” implied “an internal reformation: a rejection and overcoming of a mass of pagan elements, which, in part, the Vishnu religion already contained within itself since the beginning and which, in part, had befallen all the great Indian religions in the centuries of heathen decline . . . sorcery, amulets and charms, Śaktaism and tantrism, and the overgrowth of pure speculation by fabulism and fantasy.”³⁶⁴ This “great Reformation,” claimed Otto, “had been anticipated for a long time in a series of popular singers and poets and in an entire literature. . . . But it was really carried out by four especially significant masters, by the great Rāmānuja, by Vishnu Svāmin, Nimbārka, and Madhva. . . . If we were to imagine that someone had collected in the form of a brief summary the doctrines of the four masters of our Occidental Reformation, of Luther, of Calvin, of Zwingli, and of Zossini, that would be more or less an analogue to this text [Otto means the fourteenth-century text *Sakalācāryamat Sangraha* by Gopāla Bhaṭṭa].”³⁶⁵

In the story Holtzmann recounted of the Mahābhārata, Indian thought had undergone a development from a heroic Indo-Germanic phase to a rationalistic, proto-modern Buddhist phase. The eruption of a successful Counter-Reformation, however, had interrupted and turned back this development. As part of this story, Holtzmann argued that the pantheistic elements of the Bhagavadgītā, being based on Indo-Germanic ideas of the ubiquity of divinity in nature, were original to the poem, whereas theistic elements were added later by Brahman priests wishing to render the populace submissive before their god. Garbe, looking to defend the rationalistic heritage of the Bhagavadgītā against Holtzmann’s Indo-German fantasies, had argued that the theistic elements of the Gītā were the original ones and the pantheistic ones later interpolations, added during an age of decline into Brahman mystical and monotheistic speculation. Otto, arriving on the scene in the wake of this debate, deeply beholden to his Lutheran faith but relying on the work of the Indologists for evidence for his theories of the universality of the religious instinct in man, now added a further twist to the narrative. It was true, as Garbe had argued, that the theistic element of the Gītā was the most original. But this theistic element alone did not simply come to the fore unchallenged. Rather, it had to undergo a long history in which it was frequently overlaid with competing religious views. Finally, in a spectacular transformation—a reformation that affected both external and internal faith—it shook off this historical detritus to establish itself as the one true faith. Revealed, like the Jewish Yahweh, at the beginning of time to a small tribe as a

362. Ibid.

363. Ibid., 87–88.

364. Ibid., 88.

365. Ibid.

cult god, Kṛṣṇa had survived both schismatic movements and Scholastic speculations to finally emerge triumphant.

As implausible as Otto's reconstruction of the history of a Vaiṣṇava religion is, it is important to take it seriously because of the role it played in his overarching intellectual project. Entering the field in the wake of the triumph of the historical-critical method, his main concern was to counter historicist strains of thinking in theology—strains he regarded as, if not heretical, than at least capable of leading people astray from their faith. Against the advocates of historicism, Otto wished to demonstrate the existence of essential religious structures in man, structures that justified him in placing religious experience alongside the other Kantian domains of a priori experience. Thus, at the end of his discussion of Vaiṣṇavism, he recurred to the starting point, a conversation with a Vaiṣṇava Brahman in Benares, that had triggered the entire reflection: the “impression” of an “almost astonishing parallel formation to what we have before us in our Western religious evolution.” In the meanwhile, however (argued Otto), it had become clear that “we do not have to do with appropriations, but with convergent and parallel formations.” Furthermore, as “a more fundamental preoccupation with the development of the history of religions” would demonstrate, this was “not just an instance of an individual case, which then looks like a surprising coincidence....” Rather, it was evidence of “the most classic paradigm of a law under which the religious evolution of humanity in general stands: the law of parallels in development.”³⁶⁶

From our perspective here, it is not necessary to trace all the parallels Otto identifies. These range from the observation that “religion, from the beginning of cultural history, emerges and develops in a very similar manner everywhere among humanity, from a fundament of strange and confused spiritual states and representations,” a fundament that “recurs in astonishing similarity and regularity among the peoples of the black as well as the white, the yellow as well as the red races, that stood in the same way at the beginning of all cultural development, [and] that shines through and continues to work upon the higher religions and cultures and is still vital in the cultures or noncultures of the natural peoples even today”³⁶⁷ to the observation that there is also a “moment of simultaneity, of *parallels in time* [i.e., of when the different cultural peoples of the world take the step from one stage of development to the other].”³⁶⁸ But the more important point concerns Otto's observation that the religious instinct in man is “a most peculiar blossom that was able to blossom and awaken in every climate and on every land with stupefying similarity *and precisely through this points to a uniform and consistent function of the human psyche as such underlying it.*”³⁶⁹

The comparison of the phenomenon of religious life across different cultures thus took on a crucial heuristic role in Otto's case against historicism. It offered him a way of showing that in spite of the differences in external manifestation (which the historians had been completely taken up with), there was a uniform and consistent law to

366. Ibid., 205.

367. Ibid.

368. Ibid., 206 (Otto's italics).

369. Ibid. (italics added).

these manifestations. Once again, the precise details of the development Otto traces across six cultures—Greek/Hellenistic, Chinese (Lao Tse and Confucius), Semitic, Persian (Zoroastrianism), Indian, and Christian—need not concern us here. But it is important to note that there are four main stages or four underlying motifs he identifies consistently across all these cultures, stages he finds to have been paradigmatically fulfilled in Christianity, specifically, that form of Christianity that established itself after the Protestant Reformation. These stages are: (1) Demythologization; (2) Spiritualization; (3) Ethicization (*Versittlichung*); and (4) The Advance to the Absolute. These four, accomplished at various times in the various religions prepare the way for what Otto, speaking of Judaism, calls “the other great turn,” the “turn of religion to the individual, the subjective, and the interior” that is accomplished, paradigmatically for Judaism, with the appearance of Christ.³⁷⁰ And yet, although Otto recurred to Judaism as much as Greek and Hellenistic antiquity to make his point about a consistent evolution of religion, his central exhibit in his case against historicism was unequivocally Hinduism. As he put it, “these temporal parallels appear most clearly when one considers them from the perspective of the *Indian* development.”³⁷¹ A series of equations ensue: the Indian *ātman* is the Greek *pneuma*, *brahman* is the *logos*, both cultures identify the one with the other (i.e., *ātman* with *brahman* and *pneuma* with *logos*), both cultures begin to seek religious salvation in the separation of the soul from the body (in the Upaniṣads in the Indian tradition; Orphism and Platonism in the Greek). Finally, both develop techniques for spiritual control: Yoga in the Indian tradition seeking “spiritual concentration and abstraction from the world of the senses” and Stoic philosophy in the Hellenistic tradition seeking “ataraxia and apatheia.”³⁷² In the final stages of course, for Otto, Greek/Hellenistic tradition must go over into Christianity, but here, too, there is a parallel with Indian tradition. “The praxis of Sāṅkhya and Yoga now becomes the necessary stepping stone, but only a stepping stone, in order from this, initially merely negative salvation from the sensible world to attain the true salvation [das eigentliche Heil] in the union of the soul that has been freed thus [from the sensible world] with ‘Īśvara’.” The ‘Song of Songs’ of this stage of development is the Bhagavad-Gītā.” “And this too,” adds Otto, “has its parallels in the West.”³⁷³

The details of how these parallels work themselves out (in the Gītā, but also elsewhere, for instance, in the lives of the Vaiṣṇava saints who are “Reformers” who initiate “an entire period . . . that stands under the sign of Pietism”³⁷⁴) will concern us later. We shall trace Otto’s understanding of how the demythologization and spiritualization of religion splits up into two parallel paths—that of a rational theism and that of a mystical pantheism—and of how mysticism itself, in the final, decisive stages of religion is transformed from “god mysticism [Gottesmystik]” to “Savior mysticism [Heilandsmystik]” at the appropriate juncture. For now, let us return to what these

370. Ibid., 208.

371. Ibid., 209 (Otto’s italics).

372. Ibid., 213.

373. Ibid., 214.

374. Ibid., 216.

parallels, surely too similar to be purely coincidental, reveal about the nature of the religious instinct in man, and what this in turn reveals about the possibility of a science of religion that goes beyond the purely empirical collection of data accomplished in the history of religions. As we have seen, Otto's dominant philosophical concern since the beginning of his career was the defense of theology. According to him, theology was an autonomous discipline that had its own right alongside (and, indeed, ultimately took precedence over) the history of religions. From his perspective, historicism, by leading to relativism, was an invitation to apostasy. Otto conceded that all experience was historical (Otto, no less than other scholars of his age, was unable to completely overcome the dominance of historical thinking in his day). But an objective comparison of different religions, in his opinion, "reveal[ed] one thing with compelling force," namely,

the underlying uniform [and] common disposition of humanity in general in the East and the West, North as well as South, which, because it is present and works itself out as the motor for the formation [of human life], sets the formation of religious life, ideational as well as emotional, into motion and, because it is uniform, brings forth similar [formations] in different lands.³⁷⁵

The study of religions thus revealed something like a "religious a priori." "'Religion,'" Otto conceded, "manifests itself historically in 'religions', which are as uniform but also as different among each other as there [i.e., in the field of biological life]." "As with all other dispositions of the human spirit, its generic uniformity does not exclude specific individual manifestation..." and it was precisely the task of "the comparison of religions... to understand how this "common fundamental force, in spite of all parallelism, nonetheless once again manifested individually and distinctly in each instance."³⁷⁶ But while a comparative and descriptive history of religions was a necessary propaedeutic for theology (indeed, an autonomous discipline alongside the latter), it was not sufficient by itself. In spite of all resemblance between different manifestations of the religious spirit in man, Otto insisted on a final element of difference. As he put it, "in spite of all resemblance even these most similar of manifestations exhibit a nuanced but definite difference in [their] inner spirit." "The spirit of India is not... the spirit of Palestine... Fundamental emotional moments and values separate the two emotional worlds at the same time [as they have common traits]." And thus arose the task, for the scholar of religions as much as for the theologian, "to note [these] in their difference and to measure [them] with regard to a possible superiority [of one over the other]."³⁷⁷

Knowledge of the plurality of religious formations thus did not exempt the scholar from taking a stance on religion as such. On the contrary, in Otto's opinion, it practically obligated him to take such a stance. The history of religions had

375. *Ibid.*, 217.

376. *Ibid.*, 218.

377. *Ibid.*

its place in tracing the history of this evolution, but it had no role to play when it came to the ultimate assessment of the “value and superiority” of faith. In this latter task, theology clearly took the lead. History of religions merely provided the empirical data necessary for an evaluation of religion; the true challenge for the scholar lay in arranging these various manifestations of religious life according to a hierarchy, discovering what was common to them, and extracting this common element as the principle a priori of religious life. This principle, to be sure, could not be discovered without experience, but it was not derived from experience. It was therefore truly a priori and hence deserving of a reflection on principles a priori in the human spirit that would lead to the development of the individual (he would become self-critical and autonomous through the discovery of this principle within himself). But, and this was decisive for Otto, the scholar could never come to this point of a Kantian *Archimedean* reflection on religion if he did not follow the history of religions down the path of its natural evolution into a science of religion, thereupon into theology, and, ultimately, into a soteriology. In his colorful metaphor, “the comparison of religions [Religionsvergleichung] is merely a preparatory servant [vorbereitende Dienerin] for such *evaluation of religion* [Religionsmessung]” and “it can depart once it has done its service.”³⁷⁸ But the scholar of religion, insofar as he understood himself (and the needs of his age), could not rest satisfied with such a servile existence. He could not follow the comparative study of religions in its exit from the stage. Two options were open to him, as Otto saw it. First, “different types [of religion] could be, in this respect [i.e., in terms of their specific “spirit”], equally valid and therefore equally ‘valuable’.” But, wrote Otto, “it was also conceivable that a decisive superiority was proper to one of them.” “The coolly evaluative historian, who aesthetically appreciates the richness and diversity of historical manifestation and wishes to preserve it,” suggested Otto, “will tend to the former standpoint.”³⁷⁹ “However, he who has himself been seized and determined by the true spirit of one of these religions in his inner being and decisively so will tend to the latter.”³⁸⁰ And then, bringing the discussion full circle, that is, from an accidental history of religions to an a priori Kantian critique of religion and, finally, to a personal conviction of religion, he acknowledged:

The latter standpoint is my own. I am, in truth, earnestly convinced that Christianity, not in respect of its various historical accidental characteristics, which are disputable in manifold ways, but rather, in terms of its specific ideal content, in terms of its highly individual, typically characterized unique *spirit* [Sondergeiste] is decisively superior to the other particular forms of religion....³⁸¹

Otto’s interest in Indian religions thus dovetailed perfectly with his interest in Christian apologetics. By offering proof of a univocal development of religion, the similarity between the Vaiṣṇava and Christian faiths implicitly lent support to his

378. Ibid.

379. Ibid., 222.

380. Ibid., 222–23.

381. Ibid., 223.

assumption of a principle a priori in the human spirit. It permitted him, further, to concretize his ideas of a domain of numinous experience, which he articulated in the same year as the appearance of his *Vischnu-Nārāyana* in his *Das Heilige*. On the one hand, the comparison permitted him to undercut the historians of religion, who had only seen the parallels (and, sometimes, not even that), but not the underlying regularity that pointed to a *Law*. On the other, it permitted him to show that the assumption of a principle a priori in the human spirit, although a step forward beyond the mere historians, was insufficient. One religion approximated or realized the ideal content implicit in the principle more closely than any other. Thus, not only could the historians of religion no longer pretend indifference to the religious spirit (as a principle a priori in man, it was present in them too, so that their insistence on a distanced, neutral contemplation was tantamount to a most un-Kantian refusal to cultivate their natural powers), but they also could not be indifferent to Christianity (as the highest aesthetic and moral realization of this principle a priori it made a claim upon their assent). As Almond elegantly puts it, “Because the history of religions reflects the unified process of development of the religious a priori the history of religions is a progressive revelation of the transcendent to the human mind.”³⁸² “*Religionswissenschaft* with a Friesian foundation is theology.”³⁸³

An engagement with Indian religions served Otto magnificently in his polemic against the historians. Via his demonstration of the universality of the religious instinct in man, he had succeeded in discrediting their method. And via his demonstration of the presence of this instinct in them too (and the concurrent obligation to develop it), he had succeed in bringing them back to the fold. And yet, if he was to be fully vindicated, one final proof was required: confirmation of the original revelation via a personal experience of the mystery. Here, the Bhagavadgītā would come to his aid.

THE TRINITARIAN GĪTĀ OF RUDOLF OTTO

Scholars typically begin their accounts of Rudolf Otto’s Gītā with his *Die Urgestalt der Bhagavadgītā* of 1934 or with his *Lehrtraktate der Bhagavad-Gītā* from a year later. But, in truth, the Bhagavadgītā had preoccupied Otto long before: at least since his *Das Heilige* of 1917, where in an appendix to the text he published a translation of an extract from chapter 11 under the title “Beispiel einer numinosen Dichtung” (Example of Numinous Poetry).³⁸⁴ By this title, Otto did not mean the Bhagavadgītā was an example of a beautiful or even sublime poetry. Rather, “numinous” in his terminology, as we know by now, meant that the Gītā was a poem conducive to an experience of the *mysterium tremendum*. And thus, it was only proper that in his translation he focused on the central sections of chapter 11, which he described

382. Philip C. Almond, *Rudolf Otto: An Introduction to his Philosophical Theology* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 130.

383. *Ibid.*, 133.

384. And see also Otto, *Das Heilige*, 77 and 126.

as “the grand and terrible theophany that attempts with the human and natural means of the fearful [des Fürchterlichen] and of the majestic and sublime [des Majestätisch-Erhabenen] to convey a feeling of the unapproachability of the divine, before which the creature shivers and passes away [into nothingness].”³⁸⁵ Further, by eliminating the beginning of the chapter (Arjuna’s request and Kṛṣṇa’s response as well as his opening description of his glory), the interchanges inbetween (parts of Arjuna’s response to the vision), as well as the entire end (Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa’s conversation) Otto was able to condense the description of Kṛṣṇa’s theophany into a singular vision of horror. Thus, he eliminated verses 1–8 (4 is partially mentioned), 15–16, 18–19, 32–54, recurring to the text again only with verse 55, which he claimed was “described by the commentators as the sum and essence of the entire Gītā.”³⁸⁶

Unsurprisingly, when Otto turned his attention once again to the Bhagavadgītā in 1934, he emphasized the very same aspect. The Bhagavadgītā, he argued, consisted in its “present form” of a much briefer original poem and a number of “*special treatises* [Sondertraktaten].” The latter dealt with “highly specific characteristic doctrines of schools that were either already present or in the process of formation”³⁸⁷ and were thus negligible for understanding the fundamental intention of the poem, which, in his opinion, was to demonstrate that “this cruel terrible battle is not the work of man [and] it is not men who decide here what is to happen. The battle is the work and the will of God himself, incomprehensible and unjudgeable by human reason.”³⁸⁸ But before the reader could approach this core intention (and, even more, the insight into the mysterious essence of God, who could be cruel as well as beneficent), he had to be brought into the same situation as Arjuna. This, Otto argued, was the task of the epic poet, or, more precisely, of the “basic text [Grundstock]” of the Gītā. The latter, he argued, “reveals not the language of doctrinal writings, but the living speech of the epic itself”,³⁸⁹ it was “in no way a doctrinal- or school-text, but a *poem* that, initially entirely without general doctrinal intent, presented purely *with reference to the situation* a wonderful piece of that great tragedy that occurred on the Kuru-field and thus reveals itself to be not the pedagogic work of a teacher or a mentor [Lehrmeister] but the creation of a genuine epic poet...”³⁹⁰

Of this epic poem Otto noted: “Arjuna’s *situation* is given. Whatever in Krishna’s words corresponds to this situation has a primary and immediate claim to being original. Whatever lies outside it and is not related to it arouses the suspicion of [being a] later insertion.”³⁹¹ So far, Otto was entirely in agreement with the Indologists: the Bhagavadgītā was part of an original heroic epic, the story of the Kuru conflict; its crux lay in Arjuna’s refusal to fight. Recalling Holtzmann’s ideas of an epic Gītā and, more specifically, Jacobi’s idea of a poem coordinated to the “epic situation,” whatever was

385. Ibid., 211.

386. Ibid., 213.

387. Otto, *Die Urgestalt der Bhagavad-Gītā*, 6.

388. Ibid., 8–9.

389. Ibid., 6.

390. Ibid., 6–7 (Otto’s italics).

391. Ibid., 7.

related to Arjuna's "situation" was original to the poem. "Arjuna's 'concern' and his protest against this battle is the clear crux of the entire scene and places Krishna before the task of bringing it about that Arjuna himself declares, 'Destroyed is the delusion; I will fulfill your command.'" And, once again illustrating the influence of his predecessors in these matters, Otto concluded: "A clear context of ideas refers to this situation, [although now] shattered and obscured by the masses of material of the Gītā [at present]."³⁹² In his opinion, "Hermann Jacobi in the Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft... had, indeed, with full justification, arranged the verses from chapter 2 that speak of the indestructibility of the spiritual nature and thereupon the genuinely human appeal to Arjuna's knightly honor [Rittergefühl] according to the criterion of being appropriate to the situation as Kṛṣṇa's original answer." In one crucial respect, however, Otto disagreed with his colleagues and this was concerning Kṛṣṇa's purpose. Holtzmann and co., as we have seen, all regarded his message to be one of the importance of duty, specifically, of the soldier's duty to fight. Otto not only regarded this answer as superficial in that it stopped short of the religious significance of the dialogue, but also, as we have seen, held that the theologian could not permit himself to be preempted by anyone in the evaluation of these matters. In his opinion, Kṛṣṇa's answer consisted not of verses 11, 31–33, and 34–35 (as Jacobi thought), but, as he put it, "if anything in Kṛṣṇa's attitude and response is appropriate to the situation, it is verses 32–34 of chapter 11."³⁹³

This shift in registers, from epic to theophanic, was not accidental. As we have seen, as early as 1917, Otto had been interested in the Bhagavadgītā as an example of "numinous poetry." In his *Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa* of 1917, too, although the poem only featured at the margins of his discussion, the Gita clearly represented the preeminent example of a theistic turn (*Wendung*) in Indian thought. Calling the Bhagavadgītā the text marking the "stage of development" from "initially merely negative salvation" to a "true salvation" in the form of a "union of the soul... with 'Īśvara,'" Otto had compared it to the Song of Songs of Salomon.³⁹⁴ And thus, in an obvious reference to his predecessors' work, he noted:

No doubt powerful human appeals to knightly honor, references to the powerlessness of bodily death to affect the eternal essence of the fallen, are all thoughts appropriate to the situation. And yet, they are manifestly only an introduction to something much higher, [and] simultaneously to something that is much more effective at conquering weakness of spirit and stubborn rejection of the command to do battle. This is what [Otto argued] is expressed in these verses. Krishna opens Arjuna's eyes to the [true] meaning of what appeared to him to be entirely meaningless and abhorrent to God, to a meaning that he, in his blindness, had not recognized and [indeed] not [even] intuited.³⁹⁵

392. Ibid.

393. Ibid., 8.

394. Otto, *Viṣṇu Nārāyaṇa*, 214.

395. Otto, *Die Urgestalt der Bhagavad-Gītā*, 8.

This meaning, which the Indologists had intuited as little as Arjuna, was of course the insight into God's mysterious nature itself. "This cruel terrible battle," Otto wrote, "is not the work of man . . . [It] is the work and the will of god himself, incomprehensible and unjudgeable by human reason."³⁹⁶ Thus, "deeper and more appropriate to the situation than the thought 'You worry over those for whom you ought not worry [i.e., the fallen warriors]' was the thought 'You are nothing but my instrument', namely [added Otto] the instrument of terrible and, simultaneously, the most sublime divine majesty [Gottesmajestät]." In Otto's opinion, this verse (and this verse alone) deserved to be called "the carama śloka, the main verse of the Gītā."³⁹⁷ For, as he argued:

It is only thence that the conversation of Krishna with Arjuna attains its [proper] meaning. Krishna does not teach Arjuna a general 'doctrine of God,' not Sāṅkhya or Yoga, nor even Bhakti doctrines, but he has disclosed to Arjuna the meaning of his own situation and thus his ineluctable duty.³⁹⁸

Otto was thus transforming the very meaning of "situation." Setting out from the assumptions of his colleagues, and borrowing their thesis that only what corresponded to Arjuna's situation could be genuine, he nonetheless gave the term an entirely new connotation: "situation" did not refer to the externally given situation, but to the human condition as such. Man is confronted, on the one hand, by horrific events that evoke revulsion and a sense of refusal in him; on the other, by a God whose ways are obscure and who nonetheless demands obedience of him. And yet, it is only when he is able to grasp the unity of these two—that the destruction is willed *not by men, but by God*—that he is able to find any kind of composure. The epic poet, according to Otto, had

simultaneously disclosed the deepest sense that appeared to him in the old heroic materials and narratives of that horrific fratricidal rampage [Bruderwüten]: incomprehensible from a human perspective, a tale of terror from beginning to end, [and] a sight to inspire cold shivers of terror as long as human action is measured against human action and in terms of human standards; [but] first an epic once the veils of human perspective are rent and behind them is revealed: ĪŚVARA, the VIOLENT.³⁹⁹

As with Garbe and Jacobi, Otto was aware that it was not enough to put forth a theory of the Gītā's purpose and contents. He had to back it up with the necessary "philological" evidence, which he proceeded to do via a theory of what the original Gītā would have been. He began with chapter 11 (of which he wrote, "for this reason [i.e., because it shows "ĪŚVARA, the VIOLENT"] chapter 11, the great theophany, belongs first of all in our primordial context [Urzusammenhang]. It shows the Almighty All-Being: in his ghora-rūpa and his viśva-rūpa and the former is more

396. *Ibid.*, 8–9.

397. *Ibid.*, 9.

398. *Ibid.*

399. *Ibid.* (uppercase in original).

important than the latter"⁴⁰⁰) and thereafter added other passages which he felt also had a connection to the poem's "Urzusammenhang" or "primordial context." Among such passages he included chapter 10, verses 1-8 of which he noted that "it belonged immediately to this [context]."⁴⁰¹ This passage, he argued, was "clearly the immediate preparation for the theophany through the 'highest word' of ĪŚVARA, which he utters as the preamble to the revelation."⁴⁰² In his opinion, "once Krishna had taken away from Arjuna his first 'concern', namely over the destruction of his opponents and, simultaneously, issued a powerful appeal to his knightly sentiment," he now came "to the main thing, to what is 'higher' than everything said as yet. Therefore the connecting verse 10.1, which simultaneously paves the way for an intensification [of the discourse]: hear now my most sublime [erhabenste] word." The word Otto translated as "erhabenste" or "most sublime" was *paramam* and he once again repeated this word (i.e., "erhaben") in the next line. "For, what he [i.e., Kṛṣṇa] now has to say is more sublime than promises of immortality or mere knightly pronouncement. He will now speak as ĪŚVARA." But here, too, Otto insisted that what Īśvara had to say was not "a general instruction regarding God as such."⁴⁰³ Rather, it stood "under the perspective of the special situation" (and, by now, we know this means for Otto not the epic situation, but the numinous revelation). And thus he argued that Kṛṣṇa's "highest word" did not lie in the "list of the powers of Īśvara that are now listed here," which, furthermore, according to Otto "looked remarkably pathetic," but in the "cardinal sentence: *mattah sarvam pravartate, Everything proceeds from me [Von mir geht alles aus]*."⁴⁰⁴ This sentence, according to him, was "that upon which everything depends and *alone* depends here."⁴⁰⁵

Otto's gloss on this one sentence makes for interesting reading, for it sums up in a nutshell his entire understanding of the nature of the religious experience announced in the Gītā. It is not a relationship of equality or a philosophical exploration of the concept of divinity, but a call to genuflection in faith before a deity characterized as an absolute Other. As he put it,

God says to him [Arjuna]: "everything proceeds *from me*. It is not you who give yourself intellect [buddhi], that means, the correct judgment and will [Urteils- und Willenskraft], knowledge [Erkenntnis], clarity of thought and, in general, all states of the understanding [Gemütszustände], but rather, everything comes from me. You 'worry' about the great wise men and the kings, who stand before you. But the primal rishis [seers] and Manus have proceeded *from me*, that means the primal wise men and the primal kings, from whom these wise men and these kings on the battlefield are descended. They are not yours, but mine; the concern over them is not yours, but mine. Thus thinks—verse 8—one who thinks correctly and is devoted to God."⁴⁰⁶

400. Ibid., 9.

401. Ibid.

402. Ibid., 9–10.

403. Ibid., 10.

404. Ibid., 10 (Otto's italics).

405. Ibid. (Otto's italics).

406. Ibid., 10–11 (Otto's italics).

This experience, that is, the reception or intuition of the sublime majesty of God as vouchsafed in a direct, perceptual experience, according to Otto constituted the essence of the religious experience as such and hence even the essence of the ethical relation was already contained within it. God or Kṛṣṇa was “simultaneously preparing in speech what he is going to next reveal about himself in an overpowering revelation [gewaltiger Schau]. For in this ‘everything proceeds from me’ is already implied that the terrifying event that is to take place as well as the admonishing thought: ‘you are to be my instrument, nothing more’, proceed from him as well.”⁴⁰⁷

The descent into the irrational was thus already prepared by this speech, and by this we mean not only Arjuna’s descent into the irrational (as imagined by Otto), but also the descent of the entire discussion into the irrational (as demanded by Otto’s epistemological premises). (Religion, we may remember, for Otto was primarily a domain of irrational experience that had its own legitimacy besides the Kantian domain of rational experience.) It thus cannot surprise us that when Otto turned next to the question of what Arjuna had perceived or intuited or understood through these words, he made use of precisely the scheme for the numinous experience. Thus, he first argued that “this piece from chapter 10, verses 1–8, which is so clearly oriented toward the situation, was . . . immediately attached to chapter 2, verse 37 in the basic text [i.e., the Ur-Gītā] and it was followed immediately by Arjuna’s question in chapter 11, verses 1ff.” This, according to him, was “confirmed by Arjuna’s words, which we read in chapter 11, verse 1–3.”⁴⁰⁸

Your word, the most high, secret word, which concerns the genuine *Self*, which you have uttered to me, has dissolved my delusion. For I have (thus) learned of the true *Being and Passing-Away* of beings. And the *secret of your own majesty* [dein eigenes Majestätsgeheimnis] (I have also learned).⁴⁰⁹

Elaborating, Otto noted: “Three things [Stücke] has Arjuna heard thus far. These are precisely the three textual sections [Text-Stücke] that we hold to be original and these summarizing words of Arjuna’s are thus practically a critical canon for what could have existed earlier in the basic text and what not.”⁴¹⁰ And he emphasized yet again: “Three things Arjuna acknowledges having heard from Kṛṣṇa here.” Otto listed these three as follows: “The secret that is called adhyātman; thereafter Being and Passing-Away of all beings; and finally, your divine majesty.”⁴¹¹ And, then, bringing his “philological” investigation full-circle, he noted: “these three points correspond as precisely as possible to the content of the three passages highlighted by us as original [i.e., verses 2.1–2.37 and 10.1–8].”⁴¹² These three passages are as follows.

407. Ibid., 11.

408. Ibid.

409. Ibid. (Otto’s italics).

410. Ibid.

411. Ibid., 11–12.

412. Ibid., 12.

First, “Krishna, in order to dispel Arjuna’s śoka for the foes he would kill, had in truth *first*—until 2.37—revealed the great primal secret [das große Urgeheimnis] concerning the indestructibility of the ‘true Self’ (= adhyātman).” Second, “with this, however, Krishna in fact simultaneously instructed Arjuna in a *second* matter: what ‘*Being and Passing-Away*’ are in themselves. . . .” And, “*third*, Krishna then—namely, in 10.1–8—uttered to him his ‘highest word’ concerning the great God and his majesty as ĪŚVARA, ‘from whom everything proceeds.’”⁴¹³ Otto’s conclusion is succinct:

These three points are presented by Krishna and nothing further. These three points are accepted by Arjuna and nothing further. He does not confess to having received Sāṅkhya- or Yoga- or Bhakti-doctrines or any such other doctrines from Krishna, and what is inserted in between concerning these matters is revealed from the outset to be a later interpolation by this clearly programmatic summary in Arjuna’s statement.⁴¹⁴

Otto’s “reconstruction” of the original Gītā is essentially at an end here. The remaining five sections of this first half of the text (the second half is concerned with the expansions to this original Gītā and need not concern us here as they are a pastiche of views of earlier Indologists) are primarily concerned with expanding on the description of each of these three moments in Kṛṣṇa’s divine revelation. But before we look at these more closely, we need to pause and reflect on the passage from theology to philology (and back again) in Otto’s Gītā.

As the perceptive reader will have realized by now, Otto’s reconstruction was no more than a rather facile attempt to ground his own ideas of the numinous experience in the Indian text. (This grounding, as we know from the preceding sections, was required by his campaign against the historians of religion, since only through it could he demonstrate the existence of universal and hence innate structures of religion in the human mind.) In essence, Otto wished to demonstrate the existence of a numinous experience in the Bhagavadgītā (recall that as early as 1917 in an appendix to his *Das Heilige*, he had called the Bhagavadgītā “an example of numinous poetry”) and for this he had to find three sections corresponding to the three elements he had identified as constitutive of the essence of the numinous experience: the elements of the mysterious, of the terrifying or overpowering, and of the fascinating. Every holy encounter, we may recall, was essentially a *mysterium tremendum* (*fascinosum*). It was a mystery that revealed itself to the believer, but of course not every mystery was holy. Rather, it was the mystery that revealed itself as awe-inspiring, evoking a sense of the majesty or sublimity of God and, finally, of his endless energy or power. The *mysterium tremendum* was mysterious not only because of its mode of appearance (which could erupt into a person’s life without signs or warning) but also because of its mode of reception (it was not received as rational experience was, i.e., not mediated through the Kantian categories, but required and appealed to an entirely

413. Ibid. (italics and uppercase in original).

414. Ibid.

separate faculty in the human spirit, precisely that of *Ahnung*). Both its operation and its apperception were thus not accessible to rationality.

Corresponding to this threefold nature of the religious experience, when Otto took up the Bhagavadgītā he cast about in the Indian text for precise analogues to the *mysterium tremendum* and *fascinosum* and found them in verses 2.1–37 and 10.1–8. (Otto is not clear about where he sees the break between *mysterium* and *tremendum* in the section 2.1–37 and it is clear that this section actually does a kind of double duty for him, and this, too, is wholly proper, since the *mysterium* and *tremendum* are never wholly separate.) Verses 2.1–37 of course had already been admitted as original by Jacobi. But whereas Jacobi had analyzed them in terms of three separate moments (providing a threefold response to the criticisms of *akirtikara*, *asvargya*, and *anāryajauṣṭam* leveled by Kṛṣṇa at the outset), Otto subsumed them under a single heading, the *mysterium tremendum*. In his view, this opening section of the dialogue between Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa revealed the mysterious existence of the Self and, still more precisely, of the mysterious nature of Being and Passing-Away. The latter affects beings alone, but not Being itself, leading to an intuition of the mystery in its terrible or awesome aspect. Thereafter the *mysterium tremendum* was revealed (in verses 10.1–8) as Īśvara or God and thus in its full majesty. This part of the poem, for which Otto repeatedly found the words “erhaben” (or “erhabenste”) corresponded to the element of *majestas* he had identified in his analysis of the numinous in *Das Heilige*. But, inasmuch as the experience of God’s majesty was also calculated to take away Arjuna’s “worry” or “care” (Otto’s term is “Sorge”), it was simultaneously an experience of the fascinating nature of the sublime. “They are not yours, but mine; the concern over them is not yours, but mine. Thus thinks—verse 8—one who thinks correctly and is devoted to God.”⁴¹⁵ Finally, having heard this word (or, perhaps, we should now write “Word”), Arjuna is ready for the full experience of the numinous, for which he turns to Kṛṣṇa next (i.e., after confirming he has heard and understood “these three points . . . and nothing further”). He asks to see Kṛṣṇa’s universal, divine form.

In his earliest studies on Indian thought, Otto had already worked out a general history of Hinduism corroborating his views on the development of the religious instinct in man. Via a comparison of Christianity with Islam, Taoism, Confucianism and Zoroastrianism, he was able to document the universality of the religious instinct of man. But Hinduism clearly offered the best example on which to base a comparison. If the same structures could be found in it, then Otto had good grounds for claiming the existence of something like a religious a priori. Toward the end of his *Visṇu-Nārāyaṇa*, Otto felt he had sufficiently demonstrated the existence of such parallels to make the thesis of a religious a priori plausible. But, as he was well aware, one piece of evidence was still missing to make his case conclusive, and that was the possibility of a direct intuition of the holy. *Das Heilige* took up the task of working out the essence of the holy and concluded by analyzing the numinous experience in terms of the three moments of *mysterium*, *tremendum*, and *fascinosum*. But this

415. Ibid., 11.

was still not enough: even if there were structural parallels between different traditions in the history of religions, and even if there was a common, universal structure to the experience of the holy, unless this experience could be validated—and that means, *validated ever again*—within these different traditions, these parallels could just be historical accidents. As Otto vaguely intuited, the empirical evidence of the parallels could not confirm the existence of a religious a priori (although it could make it more likely) and the apodictic evidence of the religious a priori could not explain the existence of historical parallels (although it could make them intelligible) unless there was a way to activate the religious a priori within historical experience (or, what for Otto amounted to the same, to demonstrate its activity in a historical context). That is why *Das Heilige* ended with not one appendix, but seven—all of them examples of the appearance or intimation of the numinous in history (besides the Bhagavadgītā, Joost van den Vondel's Song of the Angels from *Lucifer*, numinous "primordial sounds" [mainly from the Upaniṣads], spirit and soul as miraculous entities [again from the Bhagavadgītā; verse 2.29], the transpersonal in the numinous [mainly examples from the Old and New Testaments], mystic elements in Luther's concept of faith, and silent worship [from a Quaker text]). Insofar as there was evidence for the activation of the religious a priori in a numinous experience in history, this experience itself had to be illuminated from two sides: first, from the subjective side, showing that there was, indeed, something like an understanding of the numinous in its three moments of *mysterium*, *tremendum*, and *fascinosum* in another tradition; and, second, from the objective side, showing that there was something like a manifestation of these three moments as a unified complex in a numinous experience. With the first part of his Gītā interpretation (sections 1–5 of the first half of the book), Otto had addressed the first task. He had shown that there was a clear theoretical awareness of *mysterium*, *tremendum*, and *fascinosum*, arranged precisely according to this tripartite structure and only according to this structure in the text. (The price for this "demonstration" of course was the utter mutilation of the text, but that did not concern Otto any more than it had concerned any other Indologist before him.) Only one thing remained: to demonstrate that there was a numinous experience latent in the text itself.

GOD REVEALS HIMSELF

This is precisely the task Otto addressed himself to next. In section 6 of his book he took up the challenge of presenting the numinous experience via a discussion of chapter 11. As we have seen, Otto regarded this chapter to be the crown and centerpiece of the Gītā, but it had hardly as yet played a role in his interpretation. He had described it as the "great theophany, [that] belongs first of all in our primordial context [Urzusammenhang]" and argued that "it shows the Almighty All-Being: in his ghora-rūpa and his viśva-rūpa..."⁴¹⁶ (the former, according to him, being more

416. Ibid., 9.

important than the latter). In anticipation of the theophany, he had demonstrated how Kṛṣṇa laid the ground for the revelation by clarifying his being in terms of the moments of the mysterious, awe-inspiring, sublime, majestic, and so forth. But now it was time to present the theophany itself. Could he find first person validation for this experience? Could the numinous be experienced directly in the text itself (and not just noted as a historical fact)? We read: “As testament [Beleg] for Krishna’s words about his own divine mahātmyam now, cleverly introduced by Arjuna’s words, follows the magnificent depiction of the theophany in chapter 11.”⁴¹⁷ Otto insisted that this experience was not such that one could merely take cognizance of it (that would still be history of religions), but a vital experience, indeed, a possibility latent in the text. Thus, he argued that the goal of the theophany of chapter 11 was

once again, not general theological instruction, but rather, solely and exclusively to evoke in Arjuna the *aesthetic knowledge* [anschauliche Erkenntnis] of the omnipotent majesty of [verses] 10.1–8, [the God] who wishes to accomplish his goals, [though] incomprehensible to men, here on the site of death and hence [bring about] the insight that Arjuna himself is nothing but an instrument in the hand of the majestic God.⁴¹⁸

In other words, these words were capable of activating the same experience in the reader, an experience that consisted not of theoretical knowledge (this corresponded to the first part of Otto’s discussion), but an “aesthetic knowledge” (“anschaulich” can also be translated as “intuitive,” but in this context clearly an “aesthetic” experience is meant) of God. And this aesthetic intuition, in turn, was calculated to bring about a transformation in the relationship of man to God:

The sense we are to understand immediately is that Arjuna found himself in great self-deception, indeed, in a state of hubris as he thought *he* was to act here out of his own plenipotence. In that he surrendered himself to his vishāda [grief], he had, albeit without being aware of it, committed [the sin of] ahamkāra, that means a conceited reliance on his intellect [Eigendünkel], had been presumptuous, had forgotten or not known that he was about to intervene in God’s prerogative of majesty.⁴¹⁹

Otto concluded:

The absolutely necessary obverse of the glorious [and] sublime divine manifestation and especially of the sentence ‘be merely my instrument’ was, *on the one hand*, the demand to direct one’s thoughts to God rather than following one’s own [train of] thoughts, to be mindful of God, to be maccittas . . . and, *on the other hand*, a restriction of Arjuna within his [proper] limits, the discovery of creaturely superbia versus

417. Ibid., 13.

418. Ibid. (italics ours).

419. Ibid. (Otto’s italics).

the omnipotent numen [i.e., the hubris of the creatures versus their Creator], the discovery of the ‘hubris’ that had lain—without his knowing it—in his refusal to fight.⁴²⁰

Otto found both these ideas to be expressed “in all clarity in the verses 18.58ff., which continue until verse 61 and attain their clear conclusion with verse 72–73.”⁴²¹ Translating *maccittaḥ sarvadurgāṇi matprasādāt tariṣyasi | atha cet tvam ahaṁkārān na śroṣyasi vinanṁsyasi ||* (18.58) as “Meiner sei eingedenk, dann wirst du durch meine Gnade über alle Schwierigkeiten hinauskommen” (“Be mindful of me, then you shall, through my grace, triumph over all difficulties”), he argued that Arjuna’s “difficulties” were not “the misery of samsāra or any other such theological misfortune.” Rather, “moha, iṣvara-smṛiti-nāṣa, samdeha, and disobedience [Ungehorsam] had been his ‘difficulties.’” He would overcome them, according to Otto, “when he did not think any more on those things for which he was not to worry, when he, rather, became mindful of God who had shown himself to him just now as the Lord and Cause [Bewirker] of everything occurring here...”⁴²² Glossing *ahaṁkāra* as “defiance [Trotz] against God... defiance of the creature that feels itself [to be independent] over against the Omnipresent [and] Omnipotent One,” he argued that such defiance was nonetheless “impotent defiance [ohnmächtiger Trotz]” for Arjuna would “in spite of his reluctance be driven to fight.”⁴²³

Before we look more closely at how Otto imagined the conclusion of the Bhagavadgītā, however, we should look at his continued description of the theophany of chapter 11, which he resumes in section 9 (sections 7 and 8 are concerned with “critical” reflections on the extent of the original Gītā, which are as vapid as those of all the other Indologists before him and therefore need not concern us further here). In section 9, Otto argued that Garbe in his translation of the Bhagavadgītā had excluded verses 7, 13, 15–16, 18–19 and 37–40 of chapter 11 in the “belief that the Ur-Gītā had been a kind of textbook of the Bhakti religion, which had been partially transformed by Vedāntic Advaita influences.”⁴²⁴ He thought that this was “doubtless correct,” for the “face that Arjuna sees is, in the first instance, not intended to describe the viśva-rūpa form of the God, but rather his ghora-rūpa as the terrible [and] majestic [Furchtbar-majestätischen].” Arjuna, according to Otto, “saw God as equipped with old mythic traits of the majestic [and] terrible [Majestätischen-furchtbaren], as many-headed, many-bodied, he saw him as burning terribly”⁴²⁵ and he glossed “many-bodied” with the comment “which originally *does* not at all mean that the God encompasses the world in himself, but has completely other motives. Cf. R. Otto, *Gottheit und Gottheiten der alten Arier*, p. 35. Many heads, arms, bodies are an expression of the numinous [and] terrible [Numinos-furchtbaren], and not

420. Ibid. (Otto’s italics).

421. Ibid.

422. Ibid., 14.

423. Ibid., 14–15 (Otto’s italics).

424. Ibid., 21.

425. Ibid.

speculative symbols of the All-One. Purusha-Sūkta verse 1, too, is to be understood in this way.”⁴²⁶ And, as if any more evidence were required, he once again emphasized that Arjuna saw “him [i.e., God] . . . as the Worker [Vollbringer] of the terrible event [furchtbaren Geschehens] . . . in a form that clearly represents itself in the depictions of the terrible Mahā-Kāla.” “The meaning of these passages is, at first,” he clarified, “not to present a vision of cosmic universality, but rather in a terrible manner to convey an impression of him who, according to his decree, when his time has arrived (when he is ‘fully matured’ to his work of wrath) brings his Judgment [Gericht] over the people and destroys them in his form as Kāla.” Likewise, he claimed that the fact that the victims entered Kṛṣṇa was not intended to show that “they belonged to his universal form, but that he swallows them and destroys them.”⁴²⁷ Then, concurring with Garbe that the “ideas in verses 37–40 diverge significantly in terminology and style from the stark and great, simple confessions in verse 48” and that they “interrupt the clear *progression* of the entire piece and disturb . . . the intended effect,” he argued for eliminating verses 37–40 (as well as verses 18–19 as a “quite superfluous anticipation” of the thoughts of verses 37ff.) to let “the confession in verse 43 [appear] as the actual *high point* [of the piece], to which the entire theophany *manifestly* wishes to lead up.” “It is first here in verse 43 and rightfully first here that this confession has its place as the sum and result [of everything that has gone before] and *crowns* the entire progression.”⁴²⁸ What made this passage so exceptional for Otto? We read:

Here God attains what He wanted to attain, namely that Arjuna recognizes and acknowledges Him as the one He had presented Himself to be in [verse] 10.1 in his introductory “most sublime word”—namely the great and sole ĪŚVARA.⁴²⁹

But as confident as Otto was of having discovered, with this verse, the entire culmination of the numinous experience (Arjuna acknowledges Kṛṣṇa as one whose might has no comparison in all three worlds), a terrible doubt haunted him. What if the acknowledgment of Kṛṣṇa’s divinity referred to his universal and not to his terrible form, that is, to the *viśvarūpa* and not the *ghorarūpa*? We have seen that Otto, speaking of the two, declared that “the former is more important than the latter.”⁴³⁰ But what was at stake in this for him? If what Arjuna beheld in chapter 11 was a *viśvarūpa*, arrived at via a philosophical reflection on the nature of Being, then not only would all of Otto’s ideas about the primacy of the religious instinct in man (and its corresponding confirmation through the primal experience of the mystery) be overturned but he would also be left without the first person experience of the numinous he had sought (and so desperately needed) in the Bhagavadgītā. Arjuna *had to have been*

426. Ibid., 21, n. 1 (Otto’s italics; the reference is to his *Gottheiten der Arier* from 1932, cited earlier).

427. Ibid., 22.

428. Ibid. (all italics Garbe’s).

429. Ibid., 22–23 (uppercase in original).

430. Ibid., 9.

having an experience of the *mysterium tremendum* and not a philosophical viewing of the All-Being. If not, Indian faith, no less than later Protestantism, would be subject to Otto's critique of having lost its way; of having put the "conceptual and the doctrinal" over the "inexpressible,"⁴³¹ whereas Otto had argued that, "In this Indian *bhakti*-religion there is presented, without doubt, a real, saving God, believed, received, and—can we doubt it?—experienced. And this is just why this religion appears to me to have been, and to be today, the most serious 'competitor,' to be taken seriously."⁴³² Otto thus argued that "it would be of course false to think that the the idea of a personal All-God who in his presencing encompasses the universe within himself, specifically [the idea of] Vishnu-Nārāyana-Vāsudeva, first arose under the influence of the Advaita doctrine. Rather, it is much older than all Advaita and all Vedānta."⁴³³ This idea of God, according to Otto (and this was decisive for him) "sprang very early on from the basic conception of Vishnu-Vāsudeva itself. . . . It is not from the impersonal Brahman that God has his universal form; rather, we could in all honesty ask . . . whether such ideas must first have been transposed onto Brahman from the original *theistic* representations of a *viśvarūpin*."⁴³⁴

It would be easy to mistake these passages for an attempt by Otto to assimilate himself to Garbe. After all, Garbe had already advanced the thesis that the theistic elements of the *Gītā* were older than the pantheistic "Vedāntic" sections. But, in spite of all external similarity, Otto was not interested in Garbe's thesis of a historical evolution (except as it served him in his project of demonstrating the existence of a primordial religious experience). His concern was to defend the idea of an immediate, irrational, and non-historically mediated experience of the holy, specifically as the terror or sublimity of the *mysterium tremendum*, that is, of God experienced as wholly other. Like his predecessors, Otto was only interested in the text as a way of confirming his ideas about religion, ideas whose origins lay in the Protestantism of his youth. Even before he encountered the Indian texts, his attitude toward religion had been decisively shaped by his Protestant upbringing, especially his reception of Luther's *De Servio Arbitrio* during the years of his licentiate.⁴³⁵ Almond records

431. See Almond, *Rudolf Otto*, 30: "Otto wants to maintain that, despite Luther's own experience and despite emphasis on the nonrational, this numinous depth was lost in later Lutheranism: 'More and more it deprived the forms of worship of the genuinely contemplative and specifically "devotional" elements in them. The conceptual and doctrinal—the ideal of orthodoxy—began to preponderate over the inexpressible, whose only life is in the conscious mental attitude of the devout soul.'" (The quotation is from Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 108).

432. Rudolf Otto, *India's Religions of Grace and Christianity Compared and Contrasted* (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1930), 21.

433. Otto, *Die Urgestalt der Bhagavad-Gītā*, 23.

434. *Ibid.*, 23–24 (Otto's italics).

435. Otto's thesis was entitled "Geist und Wort nach Luther," later published in an extended version as *Die Anschauung vom Heiligen Geiste bei Luther* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1898). This was his dissertation for the degree of Licentiatu theologiae and should not be confused with his PhD dissertation, *Naturalistische und religiöse Weltansicht*, of 1904, published a year later as *Naturalistische und religiöse Weltansicht* (Tübingen: H. Laupp, 1905).

that Otto found “the nonrational essence of religion [to be] reflected especially in the life and writings of Martin Luther.”⁴³⁶ He also cites Otto as stating that, before he found the numinous to constitute the essence of religious experience in general, he first encountered its essence in Luther’s *De Servo Arbitrio*.⁴³⁷

Thus, when Otto turned to the *Bhagavadgītā* in the 1930s, his main aim was to find evidence of a similar experience in the text. For instance, he consciously downplayed the *sarīvāda*, the dialogue between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna. Likewise, he argued that the philosophical or ontological doctrines of the *Bhagavadgītā* were secondary to its revelation. Asserting that the poem was the paradigmatic example of the universality of the numinal phenomenon, he implicitly suggested it depicted an experience of the numinous analogous to that found in Luther’s *De Servo Arbitrio*. When it came to describing the theophany of chapter 11, he consciously chose language recalling a Lutheran understanding of faith. His God was not the God of the *Gītā* and his promise was not the promise of Kṛṣṇa “to those who, always yoked, love me joyfully, I grant the singleness of mind by which they attain to me. Residing in their own very being, I compassionately dispel the darkness of their ignorance with the shining lamp of knowledge” (*Bhagavadgītā* 10.10–11). Rather, he was the Lutheran *Deus Absconditus*, the absent and crucified Christ, and the doctrine he preached was one of the strict separation of reason and faith. Whereas Arjuna repeatedly asks questions of Kṛṣṇa in a playful, almost bantering tone (and for this is immediately reassured by Kṛṣṇa’s “you are profoundly dear to me”), Otto offered an austere vision of a God of whom nothing could be asked, not even his name. In his translation Otto skipped over verse 31 in which Arjuna asks Kṛṣṇa who he is. Rather, it is Kṛṣṇa—and Otto was quite insistent on this—who introduces himself to Arjuna: precisely as the God who “according to his decree, when his time has arrived (when he is ‘fully matured’ to his work of wrath) brings his Judgment [Gericht] over the people...”⁴³⁸ Further, he claimed that God’s “form [Gestalt]” “remained *separate* both over against the one viewing him [dem Schauenden] as well as the divine beings [Götterwesen] who, praying, approach him from all sides but do not constitute parts of him.”⁴³⁹

To be sure, this reading was not without problems. For all Otto’s attempts to see parallels between them, the *Bhagavadgītā* is not *De Servo Arbitrio* and it does not articulate a solefidean doctrine (the doctrine that one is saved by *sole fide*, i.e., by faith alone). As we have seen, he had to exclude a number of verses from the reconstruction to achieve the desired effect, among them verses 18, 19, 37, 38, 39, and 40. Although he tried to justify his exclusion of these verses on technical grounds, even citing Garbe, the truth was a little more complex. Otto himself was far too immature

436. Almond, *Rudolf Otto*, 29.

437. “Indeed, my understanding of the numinous and its contrast to the rational grew out of Luther’s *De Servo Arbitrio* long before I recognized it [again] it in the *qādash* of the Old Testament and in the moments of ‘religious awe’ in the history of religion in general.” Otto, *Das Heilige*, 120 and see also 122–23 where Otto claims that this text is “practically a key to related manifestations [i.e., of the numinous in other traditions].”

438. Otto, *Die Urgestalt der Bhagavad-Gītā*, 10.

439. *Ibid.*, 22 (Otto’s italics).

a reader to arrive at a nuanced evaluation of these verses⁴⁴⁰ and pointing to Garbe did not really help. Garbe had his own reasons for excluding these verses.⁴⁴¹ Otto's real reasons for excluding these verses probably had something to do with the fact that they ran counter to his solefidean interpretation of the text. For instance, verses 37–40 articulate an ontology based on the principle of non-contradiction.⁴⁴² Rather than giving expression to an experience of the numinous understood as the *mysterium tremendum*, these verses clearly suggest that the experience was also a *rational* one. Arjuna not only describes it in words but also finds a conceptual framework within which to locate it. Thus, verse 37 makes a distinction between the Supreme Being and the Creator; verse 38 develops the theme of the relationship of the knower to the known (and to a third that transcends them both); and verse 39 identifies aspects of the creation with the Supreme Being, illustrating a continuity of Being.

All this was far from what Otto wanted to see in the text. From his perspective, these claims were extremely problematic: how could the Deus Absconditus be expected to reveal himself as knowable through reason? How could he be seen in continuity with his creation? How could he be approached hymnically and confidently, when the appropriate attitude toward him was one of terrified awe? Fortunately, Garbe's method of critical construction came to his rescue. Rather than having to integrate them into his interpretation, he could now simply eliminate the dialogical exchange between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna from his text. Aligning himself with the tradition of idiosyncratic reconstruction in Indology, Otto was able to justify the excision of these verses on "text-critical" grounds. From his perspective, his shortened text had the advantage that need not address the Indian poem's synthesis of knowledge and devotion. By eliminating these verses, he could continue to insist that the God of the Gītā was inscrutable and unreachable by reason. Arguing that in a war situation anything other than "a strong knightly word to a knight, who because of a momentary change of mood is about to let himself be shaken out of the attitude

440. Schrader thought that it was "extremely disconcerting that this 'Ur-Gītā', even before critical scholarship [Kritik] could say a word about it, has been placed before a wide audience," and then he added: "[Otto's edition] is still lacking in the foundation on the basis of which such constructions can attain security: the philological investigation, oriented toward [a knowledge of] grammar, vocabulary, style, and meter." F. Otto Schrader, Review of *Die Urgestalt der Bhagavad-Gītā, Die Lehrtraktate der Bhagavad-Gītā, and Der Sang des Hehr-Habenen* by Rudolf Otto, *Orientalische Literaturzeitung* 2 (1936): 112.

441. Contrary to Otto's assertion, he had said nothing about these verses diverging from the others in terminology and style. His only comment as to why he was excluding them from his edition was to footnote them with: "pantheistic interpolations" (for 11.7, 13, 15, 16, 18, 19) and "Vedāntic interpolation" (for 11.37–40). Garbe, *Die Bhagavadgītā*, 157.

442. In van Buitenen's translation, the verses read: "And why should they fail to bow down, great-souled One, / Creator more worthy of honor than Brahṁā? / Unending Lord God, repose of the world, / You're what is and is not and what is beyond it. [37] / The Original God, the Person Eternal, / You are of this world the ultimate support, / The knower, the known, the final abode— / All is strung upon you, of infinite form: [38] / Moon, wind, fire, Varuṇa, Yama are you, / Prajāpati are you, the great-grandfather, / I praise thee, I praise thee a thousandfold, / Once more and again I praise thee, I praise thee, [39] / I praise thee in front, I praise thee in back, / I praise thee on every side, O All! / Of infinite vigor, of measureless might, / You encompass it all and therefore are all. [40]"

that just happens to be the proper one for a knight [die eben nun Ritters Sache ist]"⁴⁴³ would be out of place, he claimed that the epic poet could not have intended to elucidate complex philosophical and ontological doctrines at this juncture.

Likewise, Otto's excision of verses 18–19 was motivated by his understanding of the numinous experience. Both verses presented insuperable problems for his thesis, since they featured detailed descriptions of the God. In verse 18, Arjuna describes Kṛṣṇa as the "highest of truths to be known, the highest foundation of all this world, [and as] the undying protector of Law [Dharma] sempiternal. . . ." From Otto's perspective, this emphasis on God as knowable and as the upholder of the Law was highly problematic. It risked reinstating the Law at the heart of the religious experience, thus undoing Luther's turn away from the Law to self-consciousness. It also risked undoing the Lessingian dichotomy between the truth and eternal longing for it. (Lessing's solution, famously recorded in his phrase, "Vater gib! die reine Wahrheit ist ja doch nur für dich allein!" was to choose the latter as the only option appropriate to a fallen, finite being.) Thus, Otto argued that these verses were "a totally superfluous anticipation of the thoughts of verse 37ff." Once they were removed, there would be a clear progression leading up to the "confession" of verse 43 (Arjuna confesses that Kṛṣṇa is the "father" of the moving and unmoving creation). The personal intimation of the numinous experience would have had its anticipated effect. Arjuna would have recognized God, as Otto put it, "as the one whom he [God] had presented himself in [verse] 10.1 in his introductory most sublime word,' namely *as the great and sole ĪŚVARA*."⁴⁴⁴

Although Otto presented his reconstruction as a contribution to "critical" scholarship on the epic, we need to exercise caution. For one thing, as has become clear, his account of the theophany was not true to the theophany of the text. Indeed, by selectively translating and foregrounding various passages, he had implanted an entire alternative theology into the Gītā. In pursuit of this goal of a solefidean reading of the text, he had read the textual evidence selectively. Like Garbe and Jacobi before him, he had used the category of "interpolation" to make certain points about the nature of true religion. For instance, he cited the earlier *viśvarūpa* of the fifth book of the Mahābhārata (before the assembled potentiaries of the Kaurava court). Noting that "the entire second half [of the theophany]," that is, those parts of it describing Kṛṣṇa as possessing manifold legs, arms, eyes and containing sun, moon, and the world domains within his body, was "*missing*" from the Calcutta edition of the Mahābhārata, he argued that "this lets us assume that this second half is a later insertion and we are here on the trail of a specific tendency of the interpolators, which then also makes itself clearly manifest in the passages excluded by Garbe."⁴⁴⁵ Arguing that the first half of the theophany of the fifth books "actually does not speak at all of a *viśvarūpa* but of the *māyā* of an all-powerful *māyin*, and portrays him in his *ghorarūpa*," Otto concluded that "it was only later that people tried to make out of this the *viśvarūpa* of the All-God."⁴⁴⁶ But—and this seemed self-evident to him—"what

443. Otto, *Die Urgestalt der Bhagavad-Gītā*, 19.

444. Ibid., 22–23 (uppercase in original; italics added).

445. Ibid., 24–25 (Otto's italics).

446. Ibid., 25 (Otto's italics).

was initially meant was monstrous miraculous power [ungeheure Wundermacht] and terrible overforce [furchtbare Übergewalt].” And, then, transposing the argument to the *Gītā* he argued: “this casts light on the theophany in *Gītā* [chapter] 11 too and gives [us] a measure for the elimination of certain insertions in it.”⁴⁴⁷

Via a detour into the *Udyogaparvan* (and via an invalid “text-critical” consideration), Otto had succeeded, as he wished, in establishing the *ghorarūpa* as the original and essential aspect of Kṛṣṇa’s theophany and not the *viśvarūpa*. He had succeeded in demonstrating (if we can call it a “demonstration”) that “the ĪŚVARA of *Gītā* chapter 11 was *not* derived from Brahmanic-Vedic tradition.”⁴⁴⁸ Rather, it demonstrated that God could be experienced directly in the numinous encounter. Indeed, this experience was not coupled to specific historical circumstances (against Garbe, Otto argued that even granted that “our epic poet” was a “worshipper of Krishna’s and thus will have been a Bhāgavata and have stood in the context of Bhāgavata tradition,” “his ĪŚVARA does not for that reason have to be simply the god of ‘the’ Bhakti religion and he does not wish to write a doctrinal treatise of bhakti”⁴⁴⁹), but could be repeated by all people and at all times. “This Garbe has overlooked. Wherever it arose, this annunciatory intimation of God wishes at first to be understood free of *all* sectarian additions in itself and in its ownmost [transhistorical or ahistorical] nature.”⁴⁵⁰ In contrast,

Bhakti theology [he wrote] as much as the moksha doctrines in competition with it had, as their genuine object, the theme of a *transcendental salvation* [*überweltlichen Erlösung*]. This, however, is not at all the question in this situation and in the dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna itself. Rather, what is in question is the absolute subordination [of the individual] to the almighty will of Him who is sublime beyond all human existence [Menschentum] and all human interests, completely incomprehensible, but for this very reason all the more binding as the will of God.⁴⁵¹

“This God,” argued Otto, “however the way might have been [historically] prepared for it, arose purely and solely from the numinous feeling of majesty [numinosem Majestäts-Gefühl] which I have studied in my book ‘Das Heilige’ on page 14ff. That is why he is the God of absolute predestination, as verses 11.22–23 [of the *Bhagavadgītā*] show.”⁴⁵² (Actually, verses 11.32–33 [Otto miscites the verses] show nothing of the sort: the *Bhagavadgītā* does not know of a doctrine of predestination; indeed, its philosophy urging the performance of disinterested action provides one of the strongest arguments against it.) By way of conclusion he cited Draupadī’s words in the third book of the *Mahābhārata* (she “knows of this omnipotent God” from “obscure *ancient* lore” but her “feeling protests against it and she raises the arguments that have been brought forth everywhere in the world against the numinous

447. Ibid.

448. Ibid., 26.

449. Ibid.

450. Ibid., 26 (Otto’s italics).

451. Ibid. (Otto’s italics).

452. Ibid., 26–27.

idea of the God who is responsible for predestination and is the sole cause"; Otto interpreted the entire scene as evidence of "how deeply alive this overpowering intuition of God, which cannot be gained out of any nature mythology, must once have been in Indian circles"⁴⁵³) and by way of confirmation, The Book of Job. According to him, if we were to look around "for members of the same species of this Īśvara" we would find such identical or related types "most clearly in the powerful intuition of God in the Book of Job."⁴⁵⁴ And bringing his investigation full circle, from the empirical research into the history of religions to the discovery of a religious a priori to the specific instances of its manifestation in history to the attestation of its presence as an actual and actualizable possibility in man back to the empirical and historical manifestations of the religious spirit, he wrote:

Here is the same God, before whose inscrutability all creatures become silent and dumb and nonetheless in the experience of His Overforce [des Übergewaltigen] simultaneously find inner śānti, the [inner] peace. We find him again in the words of Paul: "Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?" [Romans 9:20; King James Version]. These parallels warn us against a derivation of religious intuitions from sectarian origins. They warn us even more against a derivation from "Blood and Soil" [Blut und Boden]. For Job is an Edomite, that means, a Semite, and Paul is a Jew. They also warn us against seeing the unique aspect of Aryan-Indian religion, in contrast to the "absolute feeling of dependency" of perverse Jewish souls, as [being] the feeling of equality and kinship with "the ultimate reality".⁴⁵⁵

AN AUTO-DIDACT AMONG AUTO-DIDACTS

It would be easy to dismiss Otto's efforts as the work of a neophyte, but in fact he was a mainstream figure in Indology.⁴⁵⁶ Trained by Garbe,⁴⁵⁷ an adherent of his school

453. Ibid., 27 (Otto's italics).

454. Ibid.

455. Ibid., 27–28.

456. A number of scholars have indeed tried to portray Otto as an outsider. Sharpe, speaking of Otto, notes in his *The Universal Gītā* that "it is always dangerous for a scholar who has established a reputation in one branch of learning to venture unbidden into another." Edward J. Sharpe, *The Universal Gita: Western Images of the Bhagavad Gita: A Bicentenary Survey* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1985), 123. Staal, writing of the "philologists' dissection game," observes mockingly that "the famous German phenomenologist of religion, Rudolf Otto, put all these earlier efforts [i.e., to reconstruct an original Gītā] to shame by offering a demonstration that the *Bhagavad Gītā* was derived from an original *Ur-Gītā*, to which materials from eight different lost treatises were subsequently added." Staal, *Exploring Mysticism*, 86. Clearly, Otto's religious excesses are at odds with a discipline that wishes to see itself as a secular, nonconfessional science. But as the evidence presented here and in the remainder of the chapter suggests, Otto is not so much an anomaly in an otherwise unproblematic tradition, but rather, the fullest articulation of that tradition.

457. Otto wrote his dissertation under Garbe at Tübingen (completed in 1905). But it is not known whether he also learned Sanskrit from Garbe. Almond, following Friedrich

(Edgerton described his work as “the *reductio ad absurdum* of the Garbe school”⁴⁵⁸), and inheritor of the tradition of German “critical” Gītās, Otto saw his Gītā as setting forth the historical-critical researches of the Tübingen School. In his 1935 translation, he described himself as Garbe’s “grateful student” and wrote that he “wish[ed] to set forth the magnificent analytic reconstructive thinking [Gedankenarbeit] of Richard Garbe.”⁴⁵⁹ Praising Garbe’s work on the Bhagavadgītā and the Bhāgavata religion as “a classic work of research into Indian religions and specially into the Gītā,” he wrote that “in most cases he agreed with his [Garbe’s] eliminations of later interpolations by theologians representing ancient Vedic sacrificial theology and Brahman speculations.”⁴⁶⁰ There is every instance of continuity between the tradition of German Indological Gītās and Otto’s Gītā.⁴⁶¹

As Schrader recognized, “most of the verses bracketed by Garbe” were recognized “as glosses by Otto.”⁴⁶² His translation moreover was “little more than a revised Garbe.”⁴⁶³ Schrader also saw Otto’s Gītā in a tradition of German reconstructions of an original, core Bhagavadgītā beginning with W. von Humboldt.⁴⁶⁴ But in fact, the inheritance goes beyond a few borrowings or even a list of reconstructions. His edition was a direct successor to the tradition of German “philological” reconstructions of the Gītā begun by Richard Garbe, especially as concerned its ideas of method. Like Garbe and other German Gītā interpreters before him, Otto thought the Bhagavadgītā was a composite text. Like them, he thought its form as transmitted was not normative for the scholar. Like them, he thought he could bring his critical acumen to bear upon the poem to separate out its epic, historical elements from its didactic and philosophic elements, and the former again from the core of divine revelation he thought was contained therein. Accepting Jacobi’s thesis of an original epic Gītā extending up to verse 2.37, he sought to show that the answer to the questions raised therein (why fight, why engage in this horrific activity, and so on) was not given (as Jacobi thought) in the statements on the indestructibility of the soul or the appeal to the knights’ code of honor. Rather, he argued, they were to be found in an experience of the numinous as given in the theophany of chapter 11. In

Heiler, is inclined to place it in the years 1912–16 during the time he spent in the Himalayas; see Almond, *Rudolf Otto*, 21. It would be most unusual, however, if Otto studied under one of the foremost scholars of Sanskrit in Germany and did not come into some contact with the language.

458. Franklin Edgerton, Review of *The Original Gītā: The Song of the Supreme Exalted One* by Rudolf Otto, translated and edited by J. E. Turner, *Review of Religion* 4 (1940): 448.

459. Otto, *Der Sang des Hehr-Habenen*, 8.

460. *Ibid.*

461. Otto’s translation is dedicated to Garbe (the dedication reads: RICHARD GARBE smaranārtham).

462. Schrader, Review of *Die Urgestalt der Bhagavad-Gītā*, 109.

463. *Ibid.*, 114.

464. *Ibid.*, 108–9. The other Gītās Schrader lists in this German critical tradition are: W. von Humboldt (1826), A. Weber (1853), A. Holtzmann (1893), E. W. Hopkins (1902), R. Garbe (1905), M. Winternitz (1907), F. O. Schrader (1910), R. Garbe (1914), H. Jacobi (1918), H. Oldenberg (1919), and J. Charpentier (1930). Schrader does not include Paul Oltramare’s and Deussen’s interpretations as having “only a few adherents outside of India today.” *Ibid.*, 109.

taking up the Indologists' theses, but then trying to show that something more primal—an appeal to the irrational part of man's mind rather than to his rational faculties—was at work in the poem, Otto brought the irrational, anti-traditional, and fundamentalist tendencies of German Indology to the fore: since the experience of the holy was utterly personal and incommunicable, there was no need for an authoritative, legitimate and legitimizing text; every individual could put together his own scripture according to his own intuition of God. Even less was there a need for an exegetic tradition. All the scholar had to do was approach the text from the perspective of his subjective expectations and impressions and he would be able to discern, as Garbe and Jacobi too had thought before him, what was essential in it. Thus, setting aside the traditional reception of the text for a fetish history of epic origins, he tried to explain the Bhagavadgītā in a way consonant with his ideas of religion. He emphasized that the problem of the Bhagavadgītā was that of a lone hero on the battlefield, utterly abandoned by cultural norms and by his capacity for ratiocinative thinking and thus forced to turn to a personal intimation of the divine. This intimation, Otto insisted, could only be one of "ĪŚVARA, the VIOLENT."⁴⁶⁵ The teaching of the Bhagavadgītā was not "a general 'doctrine of God,' not Sāṅkhya or Yoga, nor even Bhakti doctrines. . . .";⁴⁶⁶ it required no complex exegetic effort to understand the text but only openness to the experience of the holy as the *mysterium tremendum*.

Although Otto was radicalizing the subjective, irrational aspects at the core of Indology, the more problematic aspects of his work ultimately arose from his "Indological" rather than his "theological" premises. Although under the influence of Schleiermacher he imported an irrational theology centered around feeling into the Bhagavadgītā, the major problems with his work were not due to his theological commitments. Rather, they were due to his methodological assumptions—assumptions he had borrowed from the Indologists.⁴⁶⁷ Central principles of interpretation—what it means to read a text, how to approach Indian texts, whether the commentarial tradition

465. Otto seems to have been constitutionally incapable of writing these two words in lowercase. It bears pointing out that the expression is his own; "īśvara, the violent" is not found anywhere in the Gītā.

466. Otto, *Die Urgestalt der Bhagavad-Gītā*, 9.

467. We know Otto closely followed the work of the Indologists. His Bhagavadgītā translation, for instance, engages Garbe's and Schrader's views of the text. In the introduction, he also mentions his great debt to Garbe's edition, to whom his translation of 1935 is also dedicated. For the years Almond lists as the years of Otto's peak engagement with Indian thought (1912–15) we also find he was borrowing a lot of books on and by Indologists. In 1912, for instance, he reads Schroeder's *Dhammapada*, Garbe's *Die Samkhya Philosophie*, and Paulinus Bartholomaeus' *Systema Brahmanicum*. OA 200. (Otto's works in the Otto Archive at the University of Marburg are cited according to the standard notation: every folder or collection of writings bears a unique number; OA 199 contains Otto's *Ausleihescheine*—book borrowing receipts—for Buddhism; OA 200 his *Ausleihescheine* for Indian philosophy. These documents give us a partial idea of what Otto was reading in the period; partial, because he obviously had sources other than the university library.) The year thereafter we find entries for Hermann Oldenberg's article on Buddhism in *Deutsche Rundschau*. He also read the *Proceedings of the Vienna Oriental Congress* and, possibly, Winternitz' *History of Indian Literature* (volume 2) in 1915. But the two books he keep returning to—we possess two *Ausleihescheine* for two different dates for each book, suggesting he borrowed the books multiple times—are Sir Monier-William's *Brahmanism und Buddhism* and E. W. Hopkins'

is to be consulted or not, whether the unity of the text is to be respected or not, whether a scholar is permitted to argue *ex hypothesi*, and so on—were directly influenced by the work of scholars such as Garbe, Oldenberg, and Hopkins. In his interpretation of the *Gītā*, he relied heavily on Garbe and repeatedly cited him as an authority. Although he frequently disagreed with him on the question of the original *Gītā*, he clearly saw him as a model for scientific analysis. As early as 1935, he praised Garbe's edition with the words, "In his admirably careful translation of the book, Richard Garbe in a penetrating analysis has attempted to reduce this 'Gītā' to its original form and to eliminate later insertions.... In my recently published work, 'Die Urgestalt der Bhagavad-Gītā' (J. C. B. Mohr, Tübingen 1934) I have tried to set forth Garbe's work."⁴⁶⁸ Reflecting this high assessment of Garbe, his personal copy of Garbe's translation is heavily marked up.⁴⁶⁹ Indeed, a closer look at this copy suggests that his entire *Gītā* emerged out of an engagement with Garbe's edition.⁴⁷⁰ Besides underlining salient passages, Otto wrote extensive notes in the margins (most of them undecipherable). He also used blue and red pencil to mark sections he agreed or disagreed with (not always consistently; occasionally blue verses are the ones he rejects). For instance, he marked verses 2.11–13, 20, 22, 29–37 with a single vertical blue line,⁴⁷¹ while verses 6.1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 33, 34, 35, 36 were marked with blue ticks (multiple ticks for each verse).⁴⁷² Although it is not clear why Otto highlighted chapter 6 in this way, the marks in chapter 2 correspond significantly to his ideas of the original "epic" *Gītā*. The sequence 2.11–13, 20, 22, 29–37 corresponds precisely to his summary in section 8, where he wrote: "one should therefore read one after the other and in a

The Religions of India. Otto seems to have consulted the first over two separate periods, the first beginning April 21, 1912 (from the Göttingen University Library) and the second beginning December 15, 1915 (from the Breslau University Library). In contrast, Otto borrowed *The Religions of India* on December 14, 1915 but we also have a second *Ausleihscheine* from December 27, 1915 which is marked "Verliehen" for some reason. (We thank the librarian at the Religionskundliche Sammlung for helping us decipher these annotations. Frau Schmidt was unable to explain why there were two *Ausleihscheine* for the same period.) Besides these specialist works, Otto also borrowed a number of books from Indian publishers, mainly Madras and Calcutta, above all on south Indian Vaiṣṇava saints as well as introductory works on the philosophy of Vedānta.

468. Rudolf Otto, "Krishna's Lied," *Zeitschrift für Missionskunde und Religionswissenschaft* 50, no. 1 (1935): 2.

469. As she took the book out of the bookcase, the librarian at the Religionskundliche Sammlung in Marburg exclaimed, "That is a very heavily annotated book; there are some in which he has only written one or two lines!" The annotations skip over Garbe's introduction (with the exception of one or two stray marks) and only begin from the translation. Except for two places where Otto underlined the word "Sünde" ("nur Sünde" in verse 36 and "von der Sünde" in verse 39 of Garbe's translation), chapter 1 is not marked.

470. As far as we have been able to ascertain, besides Garbe's translation Otto's collection possessed no other edition of the Bhagavadgītā.

471. Verses 14–15 are additionally enclosed in black square brackets; verse 37 has the following words underlined in red: "erhebe dich... Kampf entschlossen."

472. Otto brackets verse 27 (closing bracket only, opening possibly in 26); 28 is also bracketed (opening, but no closing bracket). Verses 27–32 are printed in small print in Garbe's translation.

closed context: chap. 1–2.13, 20, 22, 29–37.”⁴⁷³ (Even the black square brackets around verses 14–15 make perfect sense, since they show that Otto had, by this point, already decided to eliminate these from his reconstruction, while the underscoring of verse 37 indicates the peculiar emphasis he attached to it as the apex of this sequence.) Similarly, he marked verses 10.1–8 with a vertical blue line and in verse 1 he underlined the words “mein erhabenstes Wort” with a blue line (compare the preceding sections for the importance Otto attached to these words). These, as we know, constituted the kernel of Kṛṣṇa’s teaching according to him. Otto also attached especial importance to the first strophe of verse 10.1 (“Jetzt nun höre mein erhabenstes Wort”) which he argued served to “link and simultaneously prepare for the heightening [of the theophany of chapter 11].”⁴⁷⁴ Verse 8 is again underlined in blue. In Garbe’s translation, the verse read “Alles von mir ausgeht,” but Otto inverted Garbe’s expression and translated, instead, “Von mir geht alles aus.”⁴⁷⁵ Thereafter he bracketed verses 10.9–11, pressing down the pencil heavily, suggesting that he thought the interpolation began here. In chapter 11, he again marked verses 1–37 with a vertical blue line; he additionally underlined the words “erhabenen... Worte” and glossed them in the margin as “paramam vacas.”⁴⁷⁶ Of especial interest are verses 20, where Otto underlined the words “wunderbaren und grausigen Gestalt” in blue and noted in the margin: “mir[...] tremendum” and 21, where he underlined the word “Stütze” in blue (glossed in the margin as “nivāsa!”). The vertical blue line comes to an end at verse 37 (perhaps because by this point he realized that he wanted to include the whole of chapter in his commentary as genuine). However, individual markings continue: in verse 40, Otto underlined the words “Alles durchdringst du, darum bist du Alles”; in verse 43, “Du bist der Vater der Welt...beweglichen und der unbeweglichen...anzubetender und ehrwürdigster Lehrer”; and in verse 46 “Allgestaltiger” (all in blue; the last of these is doubly underlined and glossed in the margin as “viśvamūrti”). Verses 52–54 are enclosed in emphatic blue brackets, 55 is marked with a vertical blue line and in verse 55 the words “gelangt zu mir, O Pāṇḍava” are underlined in blue. Chapters 12 and 13, which we know Otto considered inessential for the Gītā, are marked red.⁴⁷⁷ Otto seems to have been

473. Otto, *Die Urgestalt der Bhagavad-Gītā*, 20–21.

474. *Ibid.*, 10.

475. Other verses or words underlined in chapter 10 are: verse 2 (“Ursprung... Götter... grossen Weisen,” underlined in blue), 3 (“alle Sünden frei,” underlined in red), 6 (“meines Wesens...aus [meinem] Geiste,” underlined in blue), and 7 (“Machtäusserung und Wunderkraft,” underlined in blue; “einer erschütterlichen Ergebung,” underlined in red).

476. Other words or phrases underlined include: “göttliche Wunderkraft” (in verse 8), “ganze Welt vereinigt, die mannigfach geteilte” (in verse 13), and “der ewige Behüter des unveränderlichen Gesetzes” (in verse 18).

477. Verses 12.1–20 (i.e., the entire chapter) are marked with a vertical red line (in verse 7, the words “Eretter aus dem Meere des Weltaseins, das zum Tode führt, Sohn der Pṛthā” are additionally underlined in red); verses 13.1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26 are marked with red ticks (multiple ticks for each verse). Otto skipped 13.12–18 (small print in Garbe’s edition), 27–28 (also small print in Garbe’s edition), 29 (large print in Garbe’s edition), and 30–33 (small print in Garbe’s edition). Verse 13.24 (large print in Garbe’s edition) is marked with red ticks. In verse 13.30 the words “wird er eins mit dem Brahman” are underlined in blue.

less certain about chapter 15. He marked verses 15.1–12 and 17–20 with a vertical red line, but skipped verses 13–16 (13–15 are printed in small print in Garbe's edition; 16 is large print) and additionally underlined the words "jenem uranfänglichen Wesen" (verse 4), "durchdringt" (verse 17), and "erkennt...liebt" (verse 19) in blue. The annotations become heavy again in chapter 18 from verse 55 onward. A vertical blue line runs alongside 18.55–60, while the word "Überhebung" is underlined twice in blue (in verses 58 and 59). Emphatic blue brackets mark off verses 67–71. Once again, with a little interpretation, this corresponds substantially to Otto's account in section 8, where verses 58–61, 66, 72–73 are listed by him as genuine.

Thus, in a sense, Otto can be seen as taking the Indologists' approach to its logical conclusion. If the form in which the text had been handed down was no longer normative for the reader, then anyone could try his or her hand at Gītā "criticism." There was no need to defer to the experts. If all that was required to produce an edition of the text was a little sophistic speculation and a little armchair theorizing about "history," then Otto was no less qualified than his teacher, Garbe. Since there was no real tradition, no real teaching, and not even a real technique, in this "red pencil" school of "critical" scholarship, any and everyone could mark up a text to produce his or her edition. (See image 3.3 for an overview of Otto's method.)

Otto was thus taking up the premises of the Indologists and radicalizing them from within. Borrowing Garbe's (pseudo)critical method, he put forward an edition that challenged Garbe's assumptions about the "original" Gītā. (For Garbe, committed to orthodoxy, this had been a text incorporating rationalistic theism; for Otto, influenced by Fries' and Schleiermacher's antirationalism, it could only be a text reflecting a transcendent, personal experience of the holy as it was once encountered by him in a Jewish synagogue.⁴⁷⁸) In effect, by advancing his own reconstruction, Otto was rejecting the claim of Garbe, Jacobi, and others to possess specialized knowledge of the text. Indeed, just as an earlier generation of Indologists did not feel a need to defer to traditional authority, Otto now made it clear that he saw no need to defer to his predecessors' authority. While he was willing to borrow language

478. "It is Sabbath, and already in the dark and inconceivably grimy passage of the house we hear that singsong of prayers and reading of scripture, that nasal half-singing half-speaking sound which Church and Mosque have taken over from the Synagogue. The sound is pleasant, one can soon distinguish certain modulations and cadences that follow one another at regular intervals like *Leitmotive*. The ear tries to grasp individual words but it is scarcely possible and one has almost given up the attempt when suddenly out of the babel of voices, causing a thrill of fear, there it begins, unified, clear and unmistakable: *Kadosh, Kadosh, Kadosh Elohim Adonai Zebaoth Male'u hashamayim wahaarets kebodo!* (Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts, the heavens and the earth are full of thy glory). I have heard the *Sanctus Sanctus Sanctus* of the cardinals in St. Peter's, the *Swiat Swiat Swiat* in the Cathedral of the Kremlin and the Holy Holy Holy of the Patriarch in Jerusalem. In whatever language they resound, these most exalted words that have ever come from human lips always grip on in the depths of the soul, with a mighty shudder exciting and calling into play the mystery of the other world latent therein. And this more than anywhere else here in this modest place, where they resound in the same tongue in which Isaiah first received them and from the lips of the people whose first inheritance they were." Cited and translated in Almond, *Rudolf Otto*, 17–18; Almond notes that the original appeared in *Die christliche Welt* 25 (1911): 709 but does not give the title of the article.

and style of argument from them (and even engage in hyperbolic praise of Garbe⁴⁷⁹), he saw no reason to let his interpretation be dictated by them. (Schrader bitterly bemoans the fact that Otto did not give due credit to him.⁴⁸⁰) As with the study of religions, where he argued that “the theologian may not let himself be preempted or overtaken by anyone”⁴⁸¹ in understanding other religions, here too he saw no reason to defer to the professional purveyors of Indian culture when it came to the task of interpretation. He would critique (without naming him) Hauer, another student of Garbe’s and, since 1927, successor to his chair.⁴⁸² He would evolve his own conventions for translating and presenting the text, including an alternative theory of its origins. Indeed, in pursuit of his Neo-Protestant project (to use Barth’s term) of placing “the modern religious subject at the center of the religious universe,”⁴⁸³ the Indologists would become just as much of an obstacle to him as the more traditional sorts of “Brahmans” they had critiqued.⁴⁸⁴

Otto’s Gītā thus highlights one of the fundamental paradoxes of Indology: if what was at stake was expertise, then the tradition clearly took priority over the Indologists; if, on the contrary, what was at stake was autonomy, then there was no reason to stop with the Indologists. Once he had mastered their method—and the detailed reconstruction of his annotations shows that he indeed had a good grasp of their pseudocritical style—he could now turn it against them. If all the arguments for an “original” Gītā were a priori, his account was as good as any other Indologist’s. What distinguished different accounts was only the fact of who, at a given time, had control over institutional sources of authority.⁴⁸⁵ What upheld Indology was not its “science,” but the fact that it was willing to ally itself with whatever the dominant institutional ideology was at the time. Nowhere would this be clearer than in the work of Jakob Wilhelm Hauer.

479. Garbe, according to the concluding paragraph of the foreword of Otto’s translation, is “the man who has accomplished for all time the foundational work for a true historical understanding of the Gītā.” Otto, *Der Sang des Hehr-Habenen*, 25.

480. Schrader, Review of *Die Urgestalt der Bhagavad-Gītā*, 110, 112, and 115.

481. Rudolf Otto, *Vischnu-Nārāyana*, 7 (Otto’s italics).

482. Ibid., 24 and see also n. 19.

483. Reinhard Hütter, *Bound to be Free: Evangelical Catholic Engagements in Ecclesiology, Ethics, and Ecumenism* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B Eerdmans, 2004), 84. Barth does not use the term of Otto, but of Schleiermacher. Schleiermacher’s influence on Otto, however, is well attested. Hütter does not discuss Otto among his Neo-Protestant theologians, but he may as well have.

484. Otto, alone of the Indologists, seems to have realized that the academics had become exactly the sort of “priests” they criticized. In his work, he is clear that this kind of tradition betrayed the spirit of Luther’s Reformation, and he saw himself as taking up arms in defense of the true Protestant spirit.

485. This becomes especially clear in Schrader’s review of Otto’s work, where he, peeved at Otto’s neglect of his work, tries to get the other Indologists to close ranks around him and against Otto. Schrader tries to portray Otto as an outsider to some kind of highly abstruse philology the Sanskritists practice, a philology into which he, Schrader (but not Otto), has been initiated.

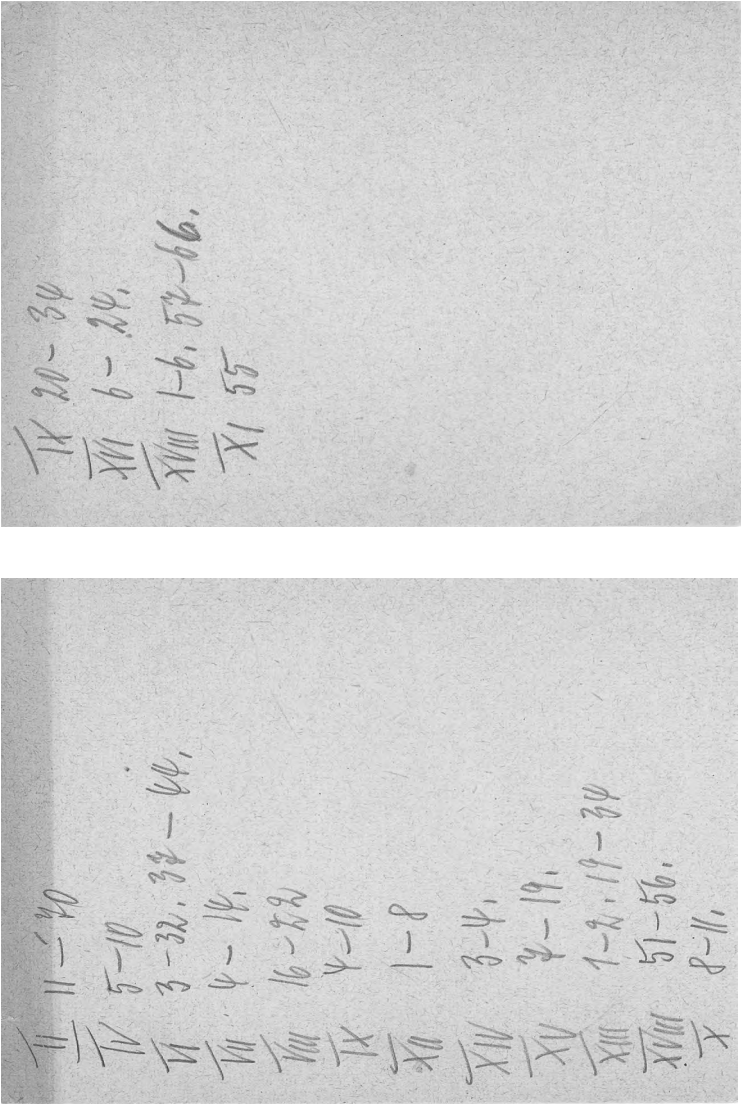


Image 3.3
Applying the critical method: Otto's hand-written note from his edition of Garbe's Gītā.

THE ĀRYAN GĪTĀ OF JAKOB WILHELM HAUER

Arriving on the scene in the wake of Holtzmann's ideas of a heroic Indo-Germanic epic, Richard Garbe's ideas of pseudocritical reconstruction, Jacobi's theories of an original Gītā oriented toward the exigencies of the "epic situation," Oldenberg's suggestion that the central purpose of the poem was the alleviation of a central combatant's ethical quandry, and Otto's valorization of an irrational, decisionistic stance on a personal religion, the Nazi Indologist Jakob Wilhelm Hauer found fertile ground for his Gītā interpretation. The founder of the religious movement *Deutsche Glaubensbewegung*, Hauer had already written a number of works on Indo-Germanic religion. Although he started life as a devout Christian (his parents were Pietists), he progressively developed an interest in primordial German religious traditions. After studying at the Basel Missionary Seminary, Hauer taught in India from 1907 onward. In 1917, he received a doctorate in Sanskrit and Religious Studies (under Garbe) at Tübingen. Appointments to Marburg (successor to Karl Geldner's chair) and Tübingen (successor to Richard Garbe's chair) followed in 1925 and 1927.⁴⁸⁶ Around this time, Hauer also began to dabble in esoteric traditions. In 1920, he founded the *Köngener Bund*, an amalgamation of the Evangelical and Free German Youth movements, remaining its leader until 1934.⁴⁸⁷

Hauer's Gītā was one of the last editions to be produced during this phase of peak interest in Germany in the Gītā. Like Garbe (whose translation he recommended to his readers as "still the most faithful and best"⁴⁸⁸), his edition was characterized by the desire "to observe and to present this religious poem from a new perspective."⁴⁸⁹ In his foreword, Hauer cited a number of translations, including those of Garbe, Schroeder, Paul Deussen, and O. Strauss, as well as Springmann's "Nachdichtung."⁴⁹⁰ However, he claimed that the problem with them was that none had attempted to understand the *Bhagavadgītā* "from its core idea." The text appeared "to almost everyone" to be "a compilation of a series of texts, which appeared not to stand in any strict relation to each other." Its basic content therefore, he argued, had as yet "not appear[ed] clearly enough." His own edition by contrast aimed at "interpret[ing] the *Bhagavadgītā* from the core problem that was given by the historical occasion [Hauer means the situation of battle that forces Arjuna to choose between loyalty to

486. Hans Jürgen Rieckenberg, "Hauer, Jakob Wilhelm," in *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, vol. 8 (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1969), 83–84.

487. Materials on Hauer can be found in Ulrich Hufnagel, "Religionswissenschaft und indische Religionsgeschichte in den Arbeiten Jakob Wilhelm Hauers: Wissenschaftskonzept und politische Orientierung" and Horst Junginger, "Das 'Arische Seminar' der Universität Tübingen, 1940–1945," both in *Indienforschung im Zeitenwandel. Analysen und Dokumente zur Indologie und Religionswissenschaft in Tübingen*, ed. Heidrun Brückner, Klaus Butzenberger, Angelika Malinar, and Gabriele Zeller (Tübingen: Attempto Verlag, 2003), 145–74 and 176–207.

488. Hauer, *Eine indo-arische Metaphysik*, vii.

489. *Ibid.*, v.

490. Theodore Springmann, *Bhagavad Gītā: Der Gesang des Erhabenen* (Hamburg: A. Saal, 1920).

duty and loyalty to his family] and out of which it [the Bhagavadgītā] arose,”⁴⁹¹ he then clarified:

This is the tragic conflict of duties, in which the hero Arjuna is caught, to whom the Bhagavadgītā is supposed to have been narrated by the divine wise man [Weisheitskundler, literally someone who teaches or proclaims wisdom]. In this conflict of duties, the wise man unveils the thoroughgoing tragedy of life as such and shows the way to a heroic mastery of this tragedy.⁴⁹²

In spite of this sense of the poem as a unified work, Hauer was not loath to adopt the historical and analytic methods of Garbe, his teacher. Indeed, in his pursuit of “advanc[ing] a livelier and deeper understanding of the Bhagavadgītā and thereby of Indo-Aryan wisdom,”⁴⁹³ this was the only method available to him, since he conceded that “nothing would be more mistaken than the intent of proclaiming the Bhagavadgītā as a kind of Bible for us; just as, in general, every attempt at an unconditioned takeover of Indo-Aryan ideas and experiences must be rejected as inorganic.”⁴⁹⁴ Here Garbe’s method, with its tremendous pliability that permitted it to be used to identify a rational proto-Enlightenment faith just as much as an irrational experience of the numinous in one and the same poem, was an incomparable benefit. For someone looking, as Hauer was, to show that the Bhagavadgītā preserved “the classical form of one of the most significant phases of Indo-Germanic religious history [Glaubensgeschichte]—to be sure mixed up with other elements but *in its core* of an exceptional essential purity”⁴⁹⁵—Garbe’s method, with its complete lack of any intellectual commitments (except perhaps to the absolute autonomy of the scholar), was a godsend.

In his concrete reconstruction of the poem, Hauer proceeded more or less as Garbe and others before him. First, he identified two distinct poles in the text. (This, as we have already seen, is one of the basic assumptions of the historical-critical method, which must always assume a minimum of two “redactorial” agencies.) He assigned the first to the Western and the second to the Eastern half of the Indo-Germanic world and characterized their relationship as follows:

India is universally held to be the land of quiet contemplation, escapist mysticism, dreaming passivity. But whoever knows India knows that this image is onesided. It is true that the Indo-Aryans, very early in their history, *turned inward* with an exceptional fervor. . . . [But] the urge toward contemplation and a turn away from the world is only *one side* of the Indo-Aryan essence. Complementing it in a polar tension is an extraordinary activism that worked itself out ever anew through the millennia in gladiatorial battles, and in the building of temples and riches. The powerful

491. Hauer, *Eine indo-arische Metaphysik*, v.

492. Ibid.

493. Ibid.

494. Ibid., vi.

495. Ibid. (Hauer’s emphasis).

northern blood inheritance [*nordische Bluterbe*] of the Aryans who migrated into India roughly three millennia before Christ did not remain concealed in India.⁴⁹⁶

Assigning the active, heroic aspects of the Bhagavadgītā to this “northern blood inheritance,” Hauer argued for seeing the Bhagavadgītā, “upon which we base the metaphysics of battle and action presented by us here,” as “the most significant attempt to bring both existential poles of the Indo-Germanic essence—the turn inward to the creative depths of the soul and the world and the turn outward to a life of action and of battle, each of which respectively asserts itself in one of the two burning centers of Indo-Germania—into a creation tension with each other.”⁴⁹⁷ According to him, this tension was ultimately resolved by the text in the injunction to do battle. “To be sure, the Bhagavadgītā also teaches a path of contemplation, but its final goal is the *work*, the *act*. At the end of the work stands the strict demand: ‘Fight!’”⁴⁹⁸ This demand, however, was not the simple demand to action, unjustified or unsupported by any metaphysics. Rather, Hauer saw it as being based upon a deep metaphysical necessity. It was not random action; it was action based upon an insight into the world process itself, that is, quasi-religious, sanctified action. Thus he argued that “it is part of the just war, so the poem teaches us, the profound *insight into the essence of the work, into the origin and the final significance of action*.”⁴⁹⁹ As an example of how “the life forces that manifested themselves in emphatic form in the East and West respectively can be brought into a unity that is capable of achieving the highest,”⁵⁰⁰ the Bhagavadgītā offered him an example (once it was purified of its nonoriginal elements, of course) of how Germany in its present situation (the book was written 1937, by which time Hauer had already become something like the official Indologist of the Nazis⁵⁰¹) could deal with the challenges facing it. The key problem as analyzed by Hauer was that of the “tragic fate of fratricidal war [Bruderkriege] which had ever again annihilated the Indo-Germanic peoples.”⁵⁰² This was the problem the Bhagavadgītā set out to analyze.

According to Hauer, the Gītā’s first message, and he emphasized this, was that “*This war is fate*.”⁵⁰³ In his words, “it is accepted as an act of providence from which there is no longer any escape.” Hence, he argued, “the question of why this war broke out at all, whether it could not still be avoided, does not arise at all. We can no longer ask about the how and the why of this war, because no one is capable of grasping the

496. Ibid., 1 (Hauer’s emphasis).

497. Ibid., 3.

498. Ibid.

499. Ibid. (Hauer’s emphasis).

500. Hauer, *Eine indo-arische Metaphysik*, 3–4.

501. Hauer was initiated into the SS and SD personally by Himmler and Heydrich in 1934; membership in the Nazi party followed relatively late on May 1, 1937; by April of 1941 he had made it to Hauptsturmführer. See Horst Junginger, *Von der philologischen zur völkischen Religionswissenschaft: das Fach Religionswissenschaft an der Universität Tübingen von der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts bis zum Ende des Dritten Reiches* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1999), 128–36.

502. Hauer, *Eine indo-arische Metaphysik*, 4.

503. Ibid. (Hauer’s emphasis).

dark force of history.” “The only question at stake in the Bhagavadgītā is: ‘How does the human being face up to this inexorable [destiny], how does he confront his fate?’”⁵⁰⁴ The answer came in the second part of the Gītā’s message.

In Hauer’s assessment, the Bhagavadgītā’s message was not restricted to a specific historical time (indeed, it could not be if the text was to be made productive for Nazi ideology). Thus, he argued that the “*historical occasion [geschichtlicher Vorwurf]* of the Bhagavadgītā” was, in fact, a “*primordial Indo-Germanic motif [uraltes indogermanisches Motiv]: the conflict between the warrior’s duty, who must fight for honor and right and thereby becomes guilty of a crime against his own blood.*”⁵⁰⁵ This “*genuinely tragic motif*” according to him was found “in the same manner in the Germanic heroic saga, where Hildebrand must slay his son (or, in the Nordic version, his brother) as in the Persian, in the battle between the hero Rustam and his son Sohrab.”⁵⁰⁶ “Only,” he argued, “this motif has been raised in India to monstrous dimensions.” “Two gigantic armies stand before each other ready for an apocalyptic battle. These dimensions correspond to the breadths of the [geographic] space and of the soul of the Indo-Aryans.”⁵⁰⁷ How did Hauer conceive of the solution to this dilemma?

In the first place, he noted that the problem was specifically Indo-Germanic in origin. “It is characteristic of the Indo-Germanic soul that the conflict of duty of life is arranged especially around the conflict between the warrior’s duty and his love for his own blood [i.e., his relatives].”⁵⁰⁸ “For,” argued Hauer, “warrior-honor and blood and family were the two basic realities, upon which the life of the Indo-Germanic peoples was based.”⁵⁰⁹ Further, it was characteristic that “the question of how life and fate are to be mastered is not clarified on the occasion of an event whose meaning lies clearly before our sight; rather, [they are clarified out of an event] that is preternaturally mysterious.” This, he argued, “demonstrated the strength and depth of the Indo-Aryan sense for life.”⁵¹⁰ Be the conflict “against all reason [Sinnwidrig],” be life “not true to reason [Sinngerecht] according to human understanding,” we must act.⁵¹¹ And then he wrote:

*We are not called upon to unravel the meaning of life and of its unfolding, but to discover and perform the act required of us and thus, acting, to master the riddle of life. All attempts to structure life according to an ethical or some such other scheme only hinder the drive to act. The Indo-Aryan people of ancient India had a good sense of questions that can never be answered. Thus, questions about the meaning of life, about why the world or why Being is, of the freedom of the will never stood in the foreground for them.*⁵¹²

504. Ibid. (Hauer’s emphasis).

505. Ibid. (Hauer’s emphasis).

506. Ibid. (Hauer’s emphasis).

507. Ibid.

508. Ibid.

509. Ibid., 4–5.

510. Ibid., 5.

511. Ibid.

512. Ibid. (Hauer’s emphasis).

Only two answers could be given. First, “whoever binds himself to God and receives his impulse from the ultimate realities, he is handed over to life and battle.”⁵¹³ And, second, “*life and battle are always tragic. Tragedy, however, makes the hero.*”⁵¹⁴

Setting out from these premises of the nature of the Indo-Germanic or Indo-Āryan outlook, Hauer undertook to reconstruct the original Gītā. In chapter 1 (titled “The Burden of Tragedy and the Path to its Mastery”) he discussed the core Gītā, comprised (according to him) of chapters 1 and 2 (only verses 1–38). Like all the other Indologists before him, he thought the Bhagavadgītā began with chapter 1. He first presented a brief summary of the chapter and then a translation of verses 1.28–33. He then resumed his translation from 1.38–1.42 and 1.45. The first set of verses (i.e., 1.28–33) according to him raised the problem of “the shedding of so much related [versipptem] blood.”⁵¹⁵ The second set then undertook a “deepening” of the tragedy of the “fratricidal battle [Bruderkrieges]” by discussing the “unholy effect [of the war] upon the caste order [Sippenordnung] that was held in such high regard by the Indo-Aryans.”⁵¹⁶ In his opinion, Kṛṣṇa refused to address this “harrowing lament.” Instead, he began (verses 2.1–2) to adumbrate “the dark undertone of the inexorability of fate.” “The battle is foreordained. The only thing at stake [now] is to survive it as is fitting [for a warrior] and so that it leads to the inner well-being [inneren Heil] of the one fighting.” This, however, requires an insight into “the concealed depths of human existence and of the world’s course.”⁵¹⁷ Thereafter, argued Hauer, Kṛṣṇa went over into teaching Arjuna about the twofold nature of human existence. First, he taught that “the world of necessity . . . is only *one* side of Being. Man, insofar as he is caught up in a tragic fate, is not the man entire.”⁵¹⁸ Rather, as Kṛṣṇa reveals in verses 2.11–21, man possess a “secret essence . . . the *puruṣa*.” It constitutes “*the innermost humanity of a man, the man-in-himself.*”⁵¹⁹ Distinguishing *puruṣa* from “the immortal soul of Christianity,” Hauer argued that it was “something much more mysterious and inexplicable.” “It is that concealed core of the human, which dwells in the depths of the soul apart from all empirical human existence and, in its ultimate essence, is identical with God.”⁵²⁰ The key to resolving the problem set up by the Bhagavadgītā (and thus also the question of the original Gītā) lay in realizing that “the tragedy of events” “plays itself out at the level of the foreground, [but] behind it an eternal background stretches back into the abyss of all Being . . . The tragedy of becoming guilty plays itself out on the ground of the repose of eternal Being . . . [but] . . . the man who recognizes that he bears this eternal Being within himself, has already, in this moment of guilt-laden activity, immersed himself [in this eternal Being].”⁵²¹

513. Ibid., 5–6.

514. Ibid., 6 (Hauer’s emphasis).

515. Ibid., 7.

516. Ibid.

517. Ibid., 8.

518. Ibid. (Hauer’s emphasis).

519. Ibid., 9 (Hauer’s emphasis).

520. Ibid.

521. Ibid., 10–11.

According to Hauer, this distinction between an apparent and an essential Being, between an empirical subject and an eternal Self permitted Kṛṣṇa in the Bhagavadgītā to resolve the problem of the tragic conflict of principles he (i.e., Hauer) located as being at the heart of the Indo-Germanic outlook. It put an end to the debate between the warrior's duty to fight and his duty or love toward his family. Kṛṣṇa could thus return hereafter to the "foundation of his [Arjuna's] empirical existence, to his *warrior honor* and *warrior duty*."⁵²² In two sets of verses (2.31–34 and 2.37–38) Kṛṣṇa then addressed the problem from an empirical, social perspective. In Hauer's opinion, with these verses, the Bhagavadgītā was originally at an end. The warrior "in his tragic conflict of duties" had been "first and foremost referred to what was self-evident about his ethical existence: to his *duty and honor*."⁵²³ These, Hauer argued, were "according to the Indo-Germanic understanding, the twin pillars of all true human existence. Whatever was not commensurable with duty and honor led to the destruction of man." "The only thing that can be preserved in the conflagration of fate is the man as *authentic* [als Echter]. Honor, that means the inner dignity of the untouched human being, and, in the case of the steadfast, the untouchable human being, who can be trusted unconditionally by everyone."⁵²⁴ Calling honor the "preservation of that adamant core of personality, whose destruction annihilates the human being in his inner totality," Hauer argued that the Bhagavadgītā intended to free the human from "all being moved by feelings [allem nur gefühlsmäßigen Bewegtsein]" and point him in the direction of "a circle of indestructible values and universal demands."⁵²⁵ Likewise, he argued that duty was "the demand that was placed upon a man from his integration in the community as the bearer of a function, as the member of a caste with a vitally important function." Such individuals, "the people of duty," were "the fabric of the community, who received their tasks from the creative Spirit. It acts through them inasmuch as, willing to make sacrifices, they place themselves in its service." "For this reason," concluded Hauer, "honor and duty are the twin poles around which the life of a people [and, above all, of the Indo-Germanic people] revolves."⁵²⁶

In chapter 2 ("The Thoroughgoing Tragedy of Human Action and its Mastery through Action"), Hauer then addressed the question of how the broader arc of the Gītā related to this solution. Repeating the concluding verse from the preceding chapter ("Holding alike happiness and unhappiness, gain and loss, victory and defeat, yoke yourself to the battle, and so do not incur evil," 2.38⁵²⁷), he argued that "with this demand the original dialogue between Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa in the older transmission was probably at an end." While he conceded that "perhaps the violent vision

522. Ibid., 11 (Hauer's emphasis).

523. Ibid., 12 (Hauer's emphasis).

524. Ibid.

525. Ibid.

526. Ibid.

527. The translation is van Buitenen's. Hauer's translation reads: "Schmerz und Lust, Gewinnen und Verlieren, Sieg und Niederlage als gleich erachtend, rüste dich zum Kampfe. So wirst du kein Unheil auf dich laden." Hauer, *Eine indo-arische Metaphysik*, 13.

of chapter XI may have also belonged to this original extent of the Bhagavadgītā,” he argued that the “current form . . . [of] the entire Bhagavadgītā with its at times very long 18 chapters,” supposedly “a dialogue between Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa in the face of the two armies as they are about to begin battle,” is “manifestly a fiction.” “Rather, a series of expansions, reflecting the philosophical and religious developments of centuries, were added to the original dialogue, which was brief and was probably followed directly by the vision [i.e., the theophany of chapter 11].”⁵²⁸

As Hauer’s original Gītā is at an end here, we will not pursue the question of how these additions found their way into the Bhagavadgītā and which of these he regarded as still being consonant with its Indo-Germanic or Indo-Āryan spirit. In any case, he insists that even in the wake of all these insertions, “*the basic theme*” of the Bhagavadgītā remained the same, namely “*the guilt-laden tragedy of human action and the mastering of this tragedy through battle and action.*”⁵²⁹ And then he repeated: “Arjuna stands in a conflict of duties: honor and the warrior’s duty on the one side, blood kinship [Sippenblut] on the other. Both demands reach into the deepest heart and will of the Indo-Aryan man. The Bhagavadgītā takes this conflict as *the core example of the ethical and religious problem of human action in general.*”⁵³⁰ As regards the separation of different textual passages in the epic, Hauer referred the reader to Garbe’s translation as a guide.⁵³¹ Although he differed with him on some aspects, Hauer argued that “the problem is well adumbrated in Garbe’s remarks.” And while he repeated that he regarded “the original poem to have consisted of the brief dialogue in chapter II, as discussed above, and of the vision in chapter XI, which probably followed this dialogue,”⁵³² certain passages in his work suggest that he also included a few other verses as original. Minimally, chapter 1 (stage-setting, discussion of the problem of shedding related blood and build up to the conflict) and chapter 18, verse 18.73 (Arjuna declares his willingness to fight) must have also belonged to the original Gītā as imagined by him. Hauer’s repeated assertion that the Bhagavadgītā culminates in the injunction to “the work, the act”⁵³³ suggests that the Gītā could only have ended for him with a clear declaration to act on Arjuna’s part. Indeed, in the final sentence of the final chapter of his book, he noted, “Arjuna is now prepared to fight the great fight that has been prescribed him. The Bhagavadgītā ends with the

528. Hauer, *Eine indo-arische Metaphysik*, 13.

529. Ibid. (Hauer’s emphasis).

530. Ibid., 13–14 (Hauer’s emphasis throughout).

531. “I do not want to go into the individual layers of the Bhagavadgītā here. I refer to the introduction to the translation of the Bhagavadgītā by R. v. Garbe. Admittedly, I see the development of the Bhagavadgītā somewhat differently than Garbe; above all, I believe that not all passages, in which *brahman* is present, can be excluded from the old texts. However, the problem is well adumbrated in Garbe’s remarks. Perhaps his solution will never succeed fully. According to my interpretation, the original poem consisted of the brief dialogue in chapter 2, as shown above, and out of the vision in chapter 11, which probably followed this dialogue.” Ibid., 72, n. 7.

532. Ibid., 72, n. 7.

533. Ibid., 3 (Hauer’s emphasis).

verses 18.73: “Destroyed is the delusion, my mind is clear through your grace, O Unconquerable One. I am resolved, my doubt banished. I will do as you say. Where Kṛṣṇa is, the Lord of Yoga, where the son of Pṛthā is, the archer, there is success [Heil] and victory, power and firm guidance [Führung]—this I know to be true.”⁵³⁴

BY REASON OF RACE

Hauer’s insistence on this radically truncated Gītā was, of course, not innocent. As with the other Indologists, at the back of his reconstruction lay a more complex ideological program. On the one hand, Hauer was interested in Garbe’s critical method as a way of identifying a more “Āryan” Gītā. On the other hand, he was interested in this core or epic Gītā as a way of making certain points about the core characteristics or strengths of the German race, characteristics he wished to see placed in the service of a program of national renewal. His reconstruction of the Bhagavadgītā was wholly oriented toward this goal. Although ostensibly a work of “critical” scholarship, his book was first and foremost an attempt to separate out the original, Germanic, and northern elements of the text from its later Indian or Dravidian elements. As he put it, “research in comparative religion has shown that the oldest, religious documents of ancient India point back to an Ur-Germanic age.”⁵³⁵ Further, he argued that “today, it is considered settled that the racial traits of the Indo-Aryans link them historically to that race which has had the definitive influence in the Indo-Germanic world, the northern [race].”⁵³⁶ Citing traveler’s reports collected in Günther’s *Die nordische Rasse bei den Indogermanen Asiens*,⁵³⁷ he argued that “even today one finds overall in the realm of the Indo-Aryans and their anthropological and geographical surroundings blond and blue-eyed types, so that we may assume that the dark-haired and dark-eyed ‘north Indians’ became darker partly under the influence of the climate [and] partly through admixture with the dark-skinned pre-Aryan inhabitants of ancient India.”⁵³⁸ Hauer further invoked “the exemplary researches of [Egon] von Eickstedt, now evaluated in *Rassenkunde und Rassengeschichte der Menschheit*,” which he claimed demonstrated “that even today primarily in northwest India, indeed all the way to Bengal and further into the mountains of south India, a type of human close to the northern type is to be found, which von Eickstedt calls the north Indios

534. Ibid., 71. The German original reads: “Vernichtet ist die Verwirrung, klar ist mein Geist durch deine Herablassung, O Unerschütterlicher. Fest bin ich, der Zweifel ist vertrieben. Ich werde tun nach deiner Weisung. Wo Kṛṣṇa steht, der Herr der Jochung, wo der Sohn der Pṛthā, der Bogenträger, da ist Heil [śrī] und Sieg, Wirkungsmacht und feste Führung—dies weiß ich.”

535. Ibid., 1.

536. Ibid., 1–2.

537. Hans Günther, *Die nordische Rasse bei den Indogermanen Asiens: Zugleich ein Beitrag zur Frage nach der Urheimat und Rassenherkunft der Indogermanen* (Munich: J. F. Lehmann, 1934).

538. Hauer, *Eine indo-arische Metaphysik*, 2.

[Indiden].”⁵³⁹ Also citing his personal impressions during his stay in India (between 1907 and 1911, Hauer taught at a missionary school in south India), he argued, “so much at least is clear, that Indo-Arya remained extensively under the influence of northern blood and stands even today, albeit in pronounced admixture with non-Aryan elements.”⁵⁴⁰

In aggressively defending the idea of an epic, Āryan Gītā, Hauer was pursuing two related goals. First, he wished to establish the existence of a cultural and racial tradition (his so-called Indogermanien or Indo-Germania) that extended “from the shores of the North Sea and the Baltic across the wide plains of north India all the way to the sea in the east and the south [i.e., the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean].”⁵⁴¹ Second, he wished to show that “in the two burning centers [Brennpunktsgebieten] of this great expanse, in *Indo-Arya* and in *Germania*, we find, even in the religious and spiritual attitudes and formations, an unmistakable kinship, one that extends all the way to their roots.”⁵⁴² It was in order to distill this common root that Hauer undertook his reconstruction of the Bhagavadgītā. As he put it, “if there is something characteristic of the northern spirit, it is the extraordinary vigor that courses through it. . . . Ever again, the Indo-Germanic community has been forced to the most intensive activity in a struggle for the unity of forces that threaten to pull apart.”⁵⁴³ The Bhagavadgītā offered him a paradigmatic example of the resolution of this struggle. By reconciling the contemplative, inward-turned aspect of the Indo-Germanic soul with its active, outward-turned aspect, he thought the Bhagavadgītā held the key to how Germans could meet the challenges arising from their unique place in the world. Drawing on the concept of Yoga (especially as elucidated in chapter 12 of the Gītā), he argued “for everyone who is still on the way the solution does not hold: either activity or meditation, but rather, both: the turn inward as well as the turn to the world; contemplation as well as *action*.” And then he emphasized, “*The combination of the two to a polar tension is in the final analysis the great secret of all men that create out of the ground.*”⁵⁴⁴

Hauer, however, was not arguing that the German people take over this insight one-to-one from the Indian text, even if, as he conceded, the same “spirit from our spirit has been at work in it [the Bhagavadgītā].”⁵⁴⁵ As he further expanded in chapter 3 (“The Purification of the Will and the Formation of the Spirit as a Precondition for the Right Action”), the Bhagavadgītā’s solutions “[could] not simply be carried over into our sphere.” “Attempts to introduce Yoga methods of the

539. Ibid.; the reference is to Egon von Eickstedt’s *Rassenkunde und Rassengeschichte der Menschheit*, originally published in 1933 but then continuously revised until by 1960 it had expanded to a three-volume work titled *Die Forschung am Menschen*. Hauer could have been citing either the edition of 1933 or the revised and expanded edition of 1934.

540. Hauer, *Eine indo-arische Metaphysik*, 2.

541. Ibid., 2.

542. Ibid., 3 (Hauer’s emphasis).

543. Ibid.

544. Ibid., 38 (Hauer’s emphasis).

545. Ibid., vi.

Indian style indiscriminately among us would inevitably cause damage.” And yet, if there was any value to the study of Indian texts, it lay in the fact that they gave valuable indications as to how Germans could master their situation. As he put it, “research into these solutions that is appropriate to our essence [eine wesensgerechte Erforschung dieser Hilfsmittel] gives us hints as to an inner training that is born out of our own nature, for a cultivation of the spirit, without which there is no true work.”⁵⁴⁶ The Bhagavadgītā, which according to him held “the question and answer of our own innermost essence,” took first place in this task.⁵⁴⁷

Thus, his next book, *Glaubensgeschichte der Germanen* (Religious History of the Germans), published just a little after his Gītā interpretation, absorbed large parts of *Eine indo-arische Metaphysik des Kampfes und der Tat* into the central portion of the text. At the same time as Hauer saw this new book as being “the result of [his] Indo-Aryan researches during the last years,” he also thought that this “new beginning” (as he explicitly called it) for the first time presented these researches in the appropriate—racial and world-historical—light. As he put it, “the religion historical facts must lead us so that we encounter this vital inner realm and are creatively moved by its meaning.”⁵⁴⁸ Yet, the problem was not simply one of self-understanding but also of historical understanding. Hauer explicitly intended his book, which he subtitled *Das religiöse Artbild der Indogermanen und die Grundtypen der indo-arischen Religion* (A Portrait of the Religious Nature of the Indo-Germans and the Basic Types of Indo-Aryan Religion), to be a contribution to the determination or identification of the different “races and peoples” of the world although the idea of racial phenotypes now could be extended to encompass not only physiognomic traits but also spiritual and cultural attitudes. For instance, right at the outset, he noted: “The India of today is not *Indo-Arya*, even though even now more of the Aryan spirit is present in India than one generally assumes. Of course, one cannot specify *a moment in time* after which non-Aryan forces so transformed the Indo-Germans who had immigrated [into India] in waves that a new type [Wesensform] of religion arose, the *Hindu* religion, to which we also accord late Buddhism.”⁵⁴⁹

It would be easy to dismiss the work of Hauer as an aberration in the history of German Indology and many contemporary Indologists have indeed done so. In the 1930s, he was in great demand as a public speaker and his Gītā interpretation was at least partly addressed to a popular audience. (As he summed up the Gītā’s message, it was intended to inculcate the values necessary for citizens to be active, useful participants in the National Socialist state: “In this way [i.e., having understood the Gītā’s teaching that the tragedy of life can only be mastered by action], we help to shape the community, people, and state [Gemeinschaft, Volk, und Reich] out of the eternal creative forces and thus ourselves reach the higher goal, for which we are destined, namely ‘conquest over the Self’: that means, in the final analysis, to

546. Ibid., 37.

547. Ibid., vi.

548. Jakob Wilhelm Hauer, *Glaubensgeschichte der Germanen*, part I: *Das religiöse Artbild der Indogermanen und die Grundtypen der indo-arischen Religion* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1937), vii.

549. Ibid., viii.

become victorious heroic individuals [sieghafte, heroische Menschen].”⁵⁵⁰) But it is important to note that apart from his Āryan excesses, his reconstruction was actually quite mainstream for the time. Although he overlaid his account with the overwrought language of race and duty fashionable at the time (words like “Blut,” “Sippe,” “Wesen,” “Erbe,” “Ursprung,” “Ehre,” “Pflicht,” “Schicksal,” and “urindogermanisch” or “indogermanisch” abound; almost every fourth line is emphasized), his work was fairly consistent with German ideas of the original Gītā. Like Garbe and Jacobi before him, he thought that the original Gītā was concerned with the epic situation of the warrior on the battlefield (although he then gave this situation a distinctly contemporary twist by relating it to the conflict of duties and to the tragic downfall of the German people). Borrowing ideas of “critical” reconstruction from his teacher Garbe, Hauer offered yet another Gītā tailored to distinctly German needs. As with all other Indologists, his scholarship was placed entirely in the service of religious, nationalistic, or ethnocentric needs. Yet, it could be so only because he was drawing on a broad continuity in German Gītā scholarship. A comparison of his Gītā with those of his predecessors reveals that his reconstruction was essentially an amalgam of Jacobi’s and Otto’s views. From the former he borrowed the theory of an “epic” Gītā; from the latter, the theory of an “esoteric” or “supernatural” Gītā. Thus, whereas Jacobi considered only verses 2.1–37 and 18.37 to be original and Otto verses 2.1–37, 10.1–8, 11.32–34, and 18.73,⁵⁵¹ Hauer considered the original Gītā to have been comprised of verses 2.1–38, 11.15–34 (and possibly more; he is not explicit on whether he includes all of chapter 11 or only the core theophany), and 18.73.⁵⁵² The main difference consisted in the interpretation he gave these verses: whereas Jacobi had tried to transpose himself into ancient times and imagine the situation from the perspective of an epic poet, Hauer’s main interest in the poem was as a source of guidance for the present. The ultimate significance of the poem, according to him, “led far beyond the domain of religion-historical or religion-philosophical observations.” Its true significance lay in the fact that “here fundamental human insights have come to light that are of vital importance for all of us, especially in the current epoch of West-Indo-Germanism with its powerful urge toward shaping the external world.”⁵⁵³

THE METHOD BECOMES AUTONOMOUS

Since its origins German Gītā scholarship had been a theological undertaking answering to theological needs (the pantheism controversy, criticisms of the priesthood,

550. Hauer, *Eine indo-arische Metaphysik*, 65.

551. Note that all three are ambiguous about whether they include chapter 1 in the Gītā. All make use of it in setting up and formulating the problem, but no one explicitly lists it among his Gītā verses, possibly because they more or less saw chapter 1 as belonging to the Bhīṣmaparvan. In other words, there could be no question of its authenticity as, for all three, it belongs manifestly to the narrative rather than the didactic portion of the text.

552. Hauer also includes 18.78 though without commenting on it. It forms the last line of his book, so evidently he attached great significance to it.

553. *Ibid.*, 39.

rejection of salvation through works, historicization of faith, the attempt to refound religion on a personal experience of the divine, the search for primordial Germanic religion). Yet when scholars in the mid-twentieth century cast about for a method to continue research into the *Gītā*, they once again took up the pseudocritical method of the German scholars. Although Indologists from Holtzmann to Hauer had used the method as a means of critiquing Brahmanism, these theological origins of the method were not immediately apparent to most. Indeed, German scholars had so completely laid hold of the title of universal, objective, secular scholarship, it seemed inconceivable to international scholars to pursue scholarship on Indian texts in anything other than a German key.

By the mid-twentieth century, the historical-critical method had become normative not only in Germany (where it received a fresh impetus due to the evangelism of Paul Hacker⁵⁵⁴), but also in the United States, France, and the United Kingdom. Even a subsection of Indian scholars adopted it in the meanwhile, leading to the impression that it was the method of critical scholarship tout court. Yet, from the questions asked (historical rather than philosophical-soteriological), to the methods applied (deconstructive rather than integrative or exegetic), and to the attitudes embodied (antitraditional, anticlerical), at every turn this method revealed its origins in Protestant theology.

One of the most striking consequences of this institutionalization of Protestant theology in Indology was the fact that those scholars who did not share the concerns of the Indologists, who rejected their solefideanism and insisted on the exegetic tradition as the best guide to understanding these texts, now appeared as religious zealots. In order to be taken seriously as scholars, they would now have to deny their own tradition, inculcating instead the values or concerns of the German critics. There could be no more striking illustration of Levenson's principle, "The academy must refuse everything to scholars as faithful members of religious communities, but it must give them everything as individuals; they must become critics."⁵⁵⁵

A further consequence of this institutionalization was that the method, which had been created for certain reasons, now became autonomous. Within Indology, the method had run on two principles: the first was fundamentalism; the second, anti-Brahmanism. Thus, for authors from Holtzmann to Hauer, it was necessary to show the existence of "hidden texts" lying beneath or behind the texts of the tradition, i.e., texts that had existed in a pure state prior to their corruption and defacement at

554. Of course, Paul Hacker did not reveal his evangelical motivations when defending the method. However, as we have shown in a recent article, at the back of his carefully concerted program of advancing German "critical" scholarship in theoretical statements and reflections on the text critical method lay an extreme evangelism that culminated in his making calls to cut funding for the Indian churches unless they pursued the task of conversion more aggressively. See Joydeep Bagchee and Vishwa Adluri, "The Passion of Paul Hacker: Indology, Orientalism, and Evangelism," in *Transcultural Encounters between Germany and India: Kindred Spirits in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, ed. Joanne Miyang Cho, Eric Kurlander, and Douglas T. McGetchin (New York: Routledge, 2013), 215–29.

555. Jon Levenson, *The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993), 118.

the hands of the Brahmans. Indology essentially ran on this “hidden text” principle. But by the mid-twentieth century, this assumption had become so well established within scholarship that it was no longer even necessary to defend the use of these alleged originals. Whereas Holtzmann and his successors had still needed to create complex narratives explaining why the pure texts postulated by them were no longer available—explanations that always required a recourse to the principle of Brahmanic corruption—by the mid-twentieth century scholars could simply begin working with one or more of these alleged originals without needing to justify this decision.

This is not to say that anti-Brahmanism disappeared from Indology; it merely went underground. Anti-Brahmanism, as we have seen, was a structural principle of Indology. Because Indologists had essentially defined their public mission in terms of an opposition to Brahmanism, that is, as liberators or educators of the Indian mind from its dependence on the Brahmans, they could not make a case for themselves absent this contrast.⁵⁵⁶ Thus, even as anti-Brahmanism became more firmly

556. The best source for this is Goldstücker's comment in his essay, “The Inspired Writings of Hinduism,” *The Westminster Review* n.s., 25 (1864): 44–169; reprinted in *Literary Remains of the Late Professor Goldstücker*, vol. 2, 50–85, see especially the conclusion on pp. 168–69: “We may, therefore, still entertain the hope that the regeneration of Hinduism will proceed from these schools, provided that they possess the energy to refuse any compromise with sectarian worship, which has brought Hinduism into contempt and ridicule. The means which they possess for combating that enemy is as simple as it is irresistible; a proper instruction of the growing generation in its ancient literature, an instruction, however wholly different from that now constituting the education of a Hindu youth; to whom reading the Veda is jabbering thoughtlessly the words of the verse, or intoning it to the melody of a teacher as ignorant as himself of its sense; who, by studying grammar, understands cramming his memory with some grammatical forms, without any notion as to the linguistic laws that regulate them; who believes that he can master philosophy or science by sticking to the textbook of one school and disregarding its connexion with all the rest of the literature. That such a method and such a division of labour do not benefit the mind is amply evidenced by the crippled results which they have brought to light. The instruction which India requires, though adapted to her peculiar wants—religious, scientific, and political—must be based on that system which has invigorated the European mind; which, free from the restrictions of rank or caste, tends to impart to it independence of thought and solidity of character.” That the implicit model on the basis of which this emancipatory history is being construed is the Protestant Reformation is amply shown by the comments on pp. 150 (“In the worst days of Roman Catholicism, when the multitude professing that religion was steeped in ignorance and its worship was no better than idolatry, there was still a considerable portion of its priesthood fully acquainted with the text-book of Christianity. It was no doubt, with its priests a question of policy whether their flock should be admitted to the knowledge which they possessed, and restored to a purer faith; but that they had the power to work that change is borne out by the history of Protestantism.”) and 154–55 (“The inspired network of the hymnic portion of the three Vedas, called the Yajur-, Sâma-, and Atharva- Veda, is apparently closer drawn than that of the other writings just named: but now that it is laid open before the investigating mind of modern Europe and India; now that the spell is broken which made the study of the Veda consist of intoning its verses to the melody of the Guru, and mechanically committing them to memory; now that native and European industry has given us in print not merely the obscure words of the hymns, but also the commentaries which lead us to their inner meaning, no Hindu can shrink from the duty of examining the grounds on which the inspiration of these three Vedas rests.”) And see also Garbe's *Indische Reiseskizzen* and

entrenched in Indology, it actually began to disappear from sight—the ultimate triumph of the ideology of critique. Thus, by the mid-twentieth century, we find Indology going through a process of professionalization. In place of the long narratives of Brahmanic malfeasance, the exuberant prose, the popular tone, we find a more sober positivist philology. The prejudices are by no means lost: they are merely concealed within a more technical and more impenetrable style. (In fact, it would be interesting to speculate that this deliberately complex, condensed style, so rich in abbreviations and technical symbols, was evolved precisely to make their work less accessible to public scrutiny, thus preserving its racial, antidemocratic biases.) Few “reconstructions” in the history of German Gītā scholarship demonstrate this as clearly as the “Brahmanic Gītā” of Simson.

In his article titled “Die Einschaltung der *Bhagavadgītā* im *Bhīṣmaparvan* des *Mahābhārata*,” Simson set out to revive the theory of the entire *Bhagavadgītā* as an interpolation into a preexisting Kṣatriya warrior epic. Although initially proposed by Garbe in 1905, the thesis had lain dormant for nearly a generation, as German *Bhagavadgītā* scholars had experimented with different reconstructions of the Gītā.⁵⁵⁷ Yet in 1969, as part of his pseudocritical analyses of the war books of the *Mahābhārata* focusing on the text as a war epic,⁵⁵⁸ Simson once again took up the thesis, claiming to have found new evidence in support. His central claim was the “text-critical” argument that the line *bhrātṛbhiḥ sahito rājan putro duryodhanas tava* (*Mahābhārata* 6.42.2ab) could not be the correct reading in that passage. Challenging the editor’s choice of this reading (the line is marked as uncertain in the critical edition since the northern and southern recensions have divergent readings here), Simson claimed to have found a better alternative: the reading *bhrātus tad vacanam śrutvā rājan putro duḥśāsanas* cited in some northern manuscripts.⁵⁵⁹ Arguing that this reading was to be preferred to the reading of the critical edition, Simson then proposed excising the *Bhagavadgītā* completely from the *Mahābhārata* on the basis of yet another “text-critical” observation, namely that the line *bhrātus tad vacanam śrutvā rājan putro duḥśāsanas* was now incongruous in context, necessitating a different arrangement to the text. “We must, he declared, “look for a reference point for the reading *bhrātus tad vacanam śrutvā*, which [now] hangs in the air.”⁵⁶⁰ Simson argued that such a reference could be found “in the sixteenth *Adhyāya*,

The Redemption of the Brahman, both cited earlier, for further examples of how German Indologists sought to define their role vis-à-vis the traditional authority figures of the Indians.

557. Garbe, *Die Bhagavadgītā*, 167.

558. This was in Simson’s dissertation, never published, *Altindische epische Schlachtbeschreibung, Untersuchungen zu Kompositionstechnik und Entstehungsgeschichte der Bücher Bücher VI bis IX des Mahābhārata*, Habilitationsschrift, University of Göttingen, 1974.

559. Specifically, these were the Bengali (B1.2.3.4), Devanāgarī version of Ānandamīśra (Da1.2), Devanāgarī version of Nilakanṭha (Dn1.2) and a handful of other Devanāgarī manuscripts (D4.5.8). B Da Dn D4.5.8 read *bhrātus tad vacanam śrutvā putro duḥśāsanas*; K4 T4 G M only read *duḥśāsanas* in place of *duryodhanas*.

560. Simson, “Die Einschaltung der *Bhagavadgītā* im *Bhīṣmaparvan* des *Mahābhārata*,” 161.

in Duryodhana's speech to Duḥśāsana (6.16.11–20) [where] the king of the Kauravas [i.e., Duryodhana] commands his brothers to focus especially on protecting Bhīṣma, their grandfather and generalissimo of the Kaurava forces." Reasoning that "we can now close the gap: 6.42.2 [must] follow[s] directly after [6.]16.20,"⁵⁶¹ he offered the following reconstruction of the epic. The text, originally an unambiguous description of the war, had been added to in two stages. Originally, verse 6.16.20, a verse in which Duryodhana commands his brother Duḥśāsana to protect Bhīṣma, had been followed immediately by verse 6.42.2. In this line, Duḥśāsana, having heard these words, advanced with his troops. At some stage, however, unnamed Brahmins took control of the text. They used this opportunity to introduce their ideology into the text, in the form of a long "interpolation" from 6.16.21 to 6.22.22 (as well as one line, later displaced in the wake of a second interpolation, to 6.42.1). At a still later date, another group of Brahmins, also unnamed, took control of the text from this first group. They in turn added to the text, specifically inserting at the end of 6.22 the Bhagavadgītā (from 6.23.1 to 6.40.78) and the Pāṇḍavas' visit to Bhīṣma (from 6.41.1 to 6.41.104). At the end of this "secondary interpolation," they then resumed the earlier narration with the final line of the "primary interpolation" (now displaced to 6.42.1). This line in turn resumed the original narration from 6.42.2. (Recall that, as Simson tells the story, verse 6.42.2 originally followed 6.16.20.)

Simson argued that once these two passages were removed, we would substantially regain the epic in its original form. Yet, matters are not so simple. First, his claim that *bhrātus tad vacanam śrutvā rājan putro duḥśāsanas* was the correct reading of the original was clearly a feint. The passage had been chosen with the explicit intent of enabling the removal of the Bhagavadgītā from the epic. The reading is not found in the Śāradā manuscript, found to be the best of the manuscripts collated for the Bhīṣmaparvan.⁵⁶² It is also not found in any of the Kashmiri manuscripts allied with the Śāradā version. It is found only in the Bengali and Devanāgarī manuscripts, both late groups.⁵⁶³ It is not found in D2.3.6, the three manuscripts that demonstrate independence from the late Northern group (i.e., BD).⁵⁶⁴ It is only found in Da, which is closely related to the B group; in Dn, which is an eclectic manuscript; in D4 and D8, which are contaminated with B; and in D5.⁵⁶⁵ In contrast, the older and superior manuscripts, the manuscripts of the ŚK group, are unanimous in reading *bhrātybhiḥ sahito rājan putro duryodhanas tava*.⁵⁶⁶ Even K4, which often shows a tendency to agree with the B manuscripts, features this reading.⁵⁶⁷ Thus, against Simson's claim that he had found the correct reading, the manuscript evidence is clearly in favor of the reading *bhrātybhiḥ sahito rājan putro duryodhanas tava*. Simson had been misled by the presence of a wavy line,

561. Ibid., 162.

562. S. K. Belvalkar, ed., *The Bhīṣmaparvan for the First Time Critically Edited* (Pune: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1947), cv.

563. Ibid., cix–cx.

564. Ibid., cx.

565. Ibid., cix and cxv.

566. Ibid., cv–cvi.

567. Ibid., cvi–cvii.

indicating uncertainty, beneath the passage, which had led him to jump to the conclusion that the editor had been hesitant between the readings *bhrātṛbhiḥ sahito rājan putro duryodhanas tava* and *bhrātus tad vacanam śrutvā rājan putro duḥśāsanas*. (He had not: the passage is marked as uncertain in the critical edition only because of the discrepancy between the northern and southern recensions and not because the editor even for a moment considered the reading of BD as potentially correct.)

Further compounding his error in reading the manuscript evidence with a misapprehension regarding the principles of textual criticism, Simson also claimed that the reading *bhrātus tad vacanam śrutvā rājan putro duḥśāsanas* was the *lectio difficilior* and therefore was to be preferred. His exact argument was as follows: “A grammatically unobjectionable, well-attested reading, albeit one that is not quite fitting in terms of content and [furthermore] is apparently not due to a [scribal] error cannot be set aside in favor of one that is less well attested, but [more] fitting in terms of content.”⁵⁶⁸ Unfortunately, the argument is nonsense: the criterion of *lectio difficilior* applies only when the manuscript evidence is not clear. In this case, *bhrātṛbhiḥ sahito rājan putro duryodhanas tava* is found in the older and less contaminated group. It is clear that *bhrātṛbhiḥ sahito*, not *bhrātus tad vacanam*, is the *lectio difficilior* that has given rise to the variants *bhrātus* and *bhrātur* by emendation. It is grammatically quite correct in context. And as for Simson’s claim that *bhrātus tad vacanam śrutvā rājan putro duḥśāsanas* was less fitting in context, this could only be true if, as he argued, the reference of this passage, that is, Duryodhana’s instructions to Duryodhana, had been left twenty-five chapters behind. If, as he claimed, 6.16.20 had been followed immediately by his emended 6.42.2, then *bhrātus tad vacanam śrutvā rājan putro duḥśāsanas* would not have been the *lectio difficilior*. It would have made perfect sense in context.

Simson’s reasons for excising the Bhagavadgītā were thus very weak. He had neither understood the process of critical edition nor had he read the manuscripts correctly. Setting out from an alternative reading of the critical apparatus, he had expanded this one point of contention into a comprehensive theory of the epic’s “redactions.” He had no evidence for these “redactions.” Even if he had been correct about the reading of the passage, it would not have given him reason to argue for an original heroic epic. The only thing that follows from the fact that certain manuscripts contain a better reading is that those manuscripts contain a better reading and not, for instance, that there existed a heroic war epic. In this case, the only thing that would have followed, had Simson been correct, is that the reading of BD would have had to be substituted for the reading of ŚK in the critical edition. It does not follow that the Bhagavadgītā is an “interpolation.” Further, when considering whether a section of a text should be included in its critical edition, an editor may consider only the evidence of the manuscripts for that section. He can only argue against its inclusion if the manuscript evidence *for that section* is inconsistent. He cannot, for instance, argue against its inclusion because he thinks some other section conflicts with it or because he has an a priori theory of what the original might have looked like. In claiming that the Bhagavadgītā should not have been included in the critical edition,

568. Simson, “Die Einschaltung der Bhagavadgītā im Bhīṣmaparvan des Mahābhārata,” 161.

Simson was effectively setting aside the principles of textual criticism (though under the pretext of offering a “text-critical” reflection on the epic). He was going beyond what could legitimately be shown using the methods of textual criticism, to return to enduring German prejudices to the effect that the epic was originally the document of a heroic Indo-Germanic civilization.

Why then insist on the Bhagavadgītā’s removal? For the answer, we must turn to Simson’s concrete reconstruction. As Simson analyzed the relevant sections (i.e., lines 6.16.20–6.42.2 of the Mahābhārata), he thought the original epic had ended at 6.16.20 with Duryodhana’s speech encouraging his brothers to march into battle. In his opinion, however, later “redactors” had added to this unambiguous war narrative in two stages. First, from 6.16.21 to 6.22.22, they had added more extensive descriptions of the opening of battle as follows:

Line/section numbers	Contents	Simson’s characterization
6.16.20	Duryodhana’s speech (end of the original text)	Original epic (unambiguous war narrative)
6.16.21ff.	Muster for battle	“Will hardly have belonged to the earliest
6.17	Description of portents	layers of the Mahābhārata; on the other
6.18	Description of the Kaurava forces	hand, it contains nothing that identifies it as
6.19	Description of the Pāṇḍava forces Dhṛtarāṣṭra inquires about which side the signs favor; Saṁjaya responds that the signs favor the Pāṇḍavas	especially late.”
6.21.1–11	Reference to the triumph of the gods over the asurās; virtue and justice determine victory or defeat	“Adhyāya 21, which now follows, raises greater doubts [than the preceding addi- tions]... [it is an] ideological coloring of the battle.”
6.21.12–17	Where there is Kṛṣṇa, there is victory	“Even more suspicious than this ideological coloring of the battle of the Pāṇḍavas is the mythic elevation of Kṛṣṇa, doubtless the work of the later sectarian revisionists to whom we owe the Bhagavadgītā.”
6.22	Glorification of the Pāṇḍava heroes; priests utter magic incantations to ensure Yudhiṣṭhira’s victory; he rewards them with gifts and wealth	“A piece of Brahmanic poetry.”
6.22.17–19 and 6.22.20–22	Dhṛtarāṣṭra’s questions (Saṁjaya does not answer, but responds with a description of the noise created by the armies)	“Tries with Dhṛtarāṣṭra’s questions to go over to the actual commencement of battle.”

Thereafter, Simson argued, the first group of “redactors” would have ended their “primary interpolation” with Dhṛtarāṣṭra’s question from line 6.42.1 (which was originally contiguous with his other questions in lines 6.22.17–19 and 20–22, but was displaced to some twenty chapters later by the “interpolation” of the Bhagavadgītā). However, at this point, a second group of “redactors” took control of the text and inserted a “secondary interpolation” from 6.23 to 6.41 as follows:

Line/section numbers	Contents	Simson’s characterization
6.23–6.40.78	The Bhagavadgītā Introduction Description of the heroes	“The diaskeuast of the <i>Bhagavadgītā</i> introduction has dropped the motivation for Duryodhana’s speech. Duryodhana here lists [the names of] the most important heroes of the two armies to his teacher Droṇa (but why, really? The names should all be familiar to him!) and ends with the command: ‘You all should protect Bhīṣma’. But instead of Droṇa reacting in any way to Duryodhana’s command, Bhīṣma, who was not addressed in any way, blows his horn to encourage Duryodhana. There follows a general noise of music instruments (23.19 <i>sa ghoṣo Dhārtarāṣṭrāṇām</i> appears out of place after the listing of the Pāṇḍava heroes)... The blowing of horns is a sign of proud battle-readiness, so that Arjuna’s sudden change of mood appears strange. So too [is] the demand to Kṛṣṇa to station his chariot before the armies so that he can see whom he must fight completely unmotivated: as though he did not know who was standing opposite him.”
	Nighttime visit to Bhīṣma	“Adhyāya 6.41, the last of our insertion, manifests just as late and unrealistic an account [as the Bhagavadgītā] In response to Yudhiṣṭhira’s question, how he may be defeated in battle, Bhīṣma replies (6.41.43) that he does not know of any foe who can overcome him. The time for his death has not arrived as yet; Yudhiṣṭhira should come once again. This is a clear reference to 6.103 where Yudhiṣṭhira’s second visit to Bhīṣma is described.... He [Bhīṣma] reveals to them that he will not fight against Śikhaṇḍin who was born as a woman. Arjuna can therefore cause him to fall if he were to use Śikhaṇḍin as his shield.... It is thus likely that the visit of the Pāṇḍavas to Bhīṣma in 6.103 is just as late an insertion as its counterpart in 6.41.

(Continued)

(Continue)

Line/section numbers	Contents	Simson's characterization
6.42.1	Dhṛtarāṣṭra's question, with which he attempts to pick up the question he had raised in 6.22.18 (but which was left unanswered by Saṁjaya)	The motivation for both interpolations is clear and corresponds to that for the Bhagavadgītā insertion: the later Brahmanic revisionists thought they had to justify the conduct of the Pāṇḍavas during the battle; first, the battle against the grandfather and teacher required an ideological justification (Bhagavadgītā); thereafter, the base trick by means of which the Pāṇḍavas defeated Bhīṣma had to be excused: the victim himself makes the suggestion and the killers cannot be criticized when they accept his suggestion. This becomes quite clear in the conversation of Yudhiṣṭhira with Droṇa, whom he visits next after Bhīṣma. . . . Regarding the question of how he may be defeated, Droṇa indicates the sole means that would motivate him to lay down his weapons. . . . To be sure, this is not as direct a demand to use an unfair trick as that in 6.103, [but] the intent of the author is manifestly the same: the justification of the ignoble [unritterlich] tactics of the Pāṇḍavas, which must have been embarrassing to the devout Brāhmaṇas of the later age."

In the introduction to his article, Simson characterized his interpretation as a contribution to "textual criticism" of the Bhagavadgītā. In the very first sentence, he wrote that "scholarship appears to be largely unanimous regarding the relatively old age of at least the oldest parts of the *Bhagavadgītā*" and he cited the work of Holtzmann Jr., E. W. Hopkins, and Richard Garbe as evidence.⁵⁶⁹ Further noting that scholars were not clear about whether "these oldest portions [of the Bhagavadgītā] had belonged to the *Mahābhārata* from the beginning, or whether the *Bhagavadgītā* was an insertion that had previously existed as an independent work," he argued that

569. Ibid., 159.

it appears “not totally superfluous to investigate once again whether text critical reasons can be found for an interpolation in order to clarify at least a partial aspect of the complex of questions surrounding the *Bhagavadgītā*.”⁵⁷⁰ Thus, he presented his work as a contribution to critical scholarship on the Indian text.

Yet, even a brief look at Simson’s reconstruction suffices to demonstrate that his “researches” were completely subjective, ideologically driven, and lacked all grounding in fact. For all that he affected a realistic, historicist attitude, his ideas of the *Mahābhārata* were based on nothing more than a German prepossession in favor of a heroic epic—a prepossession whose roots, we know, ultimately lie in the Romantic movement. Borrowing ideas of an original epic from his predecessors, Simson described the changes to this alleged original in terms that basically reprised the century-old Holtzmannian narrative of a war narrative interpolated with “Brahmanic” and “Kṛṣṇaite” elements. For instance, he claimed of sections 6.16–19, which describe the muster for battle, that they “will hardly have belonged to the earliest layers of the *Mahābhārata*; on the other hand, it contains nothing that identifies it as especially late.”⁵⁷¹ In an echo of Holtzmann’s thesis of a three-stage redaction of the epic (Buddhist, Brahmanic, and Purāṇic), he also claimed that this “first insertion occurred in the framework of the great revision of the *Mahābhārata* to which we owe the account of battle in its present form; the poet at work here still had an immediate interest in the battle, the dark signs announcing it, the great heroes and the splendor of the armies arrayed on the battlefield.”⁵⁷² With this claim, Simson was effectively pruning back the *Mahābhārata*’s literary descriptions of war, to create the simple, primitive heroic composition Holtzmann had posited as being at the heart of the Indian epic.

Like Holtzmann, Simson thought that the original epic would have been an unambiguous war narrative. Like the Freiburg scholar, he thought that longer, more detailed descriptions of battle must have been added to the epic as part of the transformation in its nature from a historical recollection and song of praise to a more elaborate literary and philosophic work. Subscribing to a theory of “epic” as essentially a violence-filled work recording the military triumphs of a primitive people, he argued that these passages already reflected a change from the heroic age to a more refined, sophistic, and, ultimately, immoral age. As compared to the heroic epic, with its white-on-black conflict between two tribes or two peoples struggling for superiority, he thought that the reference to a mythic and/or metaphysical dimension in sections 6.21–22 (a reference to the eternal conflict between the gods and titans as the mythic background of the epic and to the fact that victory ultimately accrues to the just) already indicated a shift to a new, sophistic outlook. Thus he claimed that these sections, even though occurring as part of the “primary interpolation,” “fall out of the framework [of the first interpolation] and we may, at least partially, presume a later origin for them.”⁵⁷³ Declaring that section 6.21 “raises greater doubts [than

570. *Ibid.*, 159–60.

571. *Ibid.*, 165.

572. *Ibid.*, 167.

573. *Ibid.*

the preceding additions],” he argued that it represented an “ideological coloring of the battle.”⁵⁷⁴ From his perspective, by introducing the question of right and wrong, this section already prejudiced the evaluation of the primal tribal conflict, disposing the mind of the reader positively toward the Pāṇḍavas. Indeed, he claimed that the following section (6.21.12–17) with its “mythic elevation of Kṛṣṇa” was “even more suspicious than this ideological coloring of the battle of the Pāṇḍavas...” Echoing Holtzmann’s views of Kṛṣṇa as a cipher for the Brahmanic takeover of the epic, Simson claimed that this section was “doubtless the work of the later sectarian revisionists to whom we owe the Bhagavadgītā.”⁵⁷⁵ He cited the presence of the expression “where there is Kṛṣṇa, there is victory” in this section (verses 12 and 14) and he insinuated that this was compelling evidence of an attempt to justify the Pāṇḍavas. Likewise, he claimed of section 6.22 (the Brahmins perform rites to ensure king Yudhiṣṭhira’s victory, and he rewards them with gifts) that it was “a piece of Brahmanic poetry [Brahmanenpoesie]” and then he asserted: “we can do without it.”⁵⁷⁶

Simson not only adopted Holtzmann’s theory of a heroic epic later reworked to a piece of Brahmanic apologetics but also tapped into a pervasive current of anti-Brahmanic sentiment. Even though he was writing nearly a century and a half after that father of German racial anti-Semitism, Christian Lassen, it seemed German hatred of the priests was unappeased. Thus, when he turned to the second of his two “interpolations,” he raised arguments in the most ad hoc manner—all designed to show that the Bhagavadgītā could not have been part of the original Mahābhārata. For instance, he claimed that the opening chapter of the Bhagavadgītā was probably borrowed from (or fashioned after) chapter 6.47. According to Simson, the description of the heroes “made much more sense in this, the source [Vorlage] from which they were taken.” He described Duryodhana’s actions in fulsome terms and claimed that “his speech is addressed to the assembled generals [Führer] of his army, not, as in the Gītā, to Droṇa.”⁵⁷⁷ Likewise he claimed that “the diaskeuast of the *Bhagavadgītā* introduction has dropped the motivation for Duryodhana’s speech. Duryodhana here lists [the names of] the most important heroes of the two armies to his teacher Droṇa” and then he added parenthetically: “But why, really? The names should all be familiar to him!”⁵⁷⁸ According to Simson, although Duryodhana ends his speech with the command “‘You all should protect Bhiṣma’... instead of Droṇa reacting in any way to Duryodhana’s command, Bhiṣma, who was not addressed in any way, blows his horn to encourage Duryodhana” and from this he seemingly concluded that the passage was not genuine.⁵⁷⁹ (Confusion in battle is admitted by German Indologists as an argument against events following a precise order only when what is at stake is demonstrating the existence of an original, heroic Indo-Germanic epic; at all other times lack of order is a sign of changes to the “Vorlage.”) Likewise, he claimed that

574. Ibid., 166.

575. Ibid.

576. Ibid.

577. Ibid., 170.

578. Ibid., 170–71.

579. Ibid., 171.

the line *sa ghoṣo Dhārtarāṣṭrāṇām* (6.23.19) “appears out of place after the listing of the Pāṇḍava heroes. . . . The blowing of horns is a sign of proud battle-readiness, so that Arjuna’s sudden change of mood appears strange. So too the demand to Kṛṣṇa to station his chariot before the armies so that he can see whom he must fight is completely unmotivated: as if he did not know who was standing opposite him.”⁵⁸⁰

Simson’s anti-Brahmanism reached a climax in the concluding section of his article, when discussing the story of the Pāṇḍavas’ nighttime visit to Bhīṣma. He claimed that “*adhyāya* 6.41, the last of our [secondary] insertion, manifests just as late and unrealistic an account [as the *Bhagavadgītā*],”⁵⁸¹ and then argued that this episode was inserted as an obvious reference to section 6.23 (Yudhiṣṭhira’s second nighttime visit, when Bhīṣma reveals the means by which he may be defeated) and he clarified the function of this section as follows:

He [Bhīṣma] reveals to them that he will not fight against Śikhāṇḍin who was born as a woman. Arjuna can therefore cause him to fall if he were to use Śikhāṇḍin as his shield. The Pāṇḍavas return to their camp, where their briefing continues. Arjuna has qualms about killing his own grandfather. Then Kṛṣṇa reminds him of his Kṣatriya duties and utters a Bṛhaspati word. Without raising further objections, Arjuna now suggests the same trick as Bhīṣma had just given them. . . .⁵⁸²

Then he summarized:

It is thus likely that the visit of the Pāṇḍavas to Bhīṣma in 6.103 is just as late an insertion as its counterpart in 6.41. The motivation for both interpolations is clear and corresponds to that for the *Bhagavadgītā* insertion: the later Brahmanic revisionists thought they had to justify the conduct of the Pāṇḍavas during the battle; first, the battle against the grandfather and teacher required an ideological justification (*Bhagavadgītā*); thereafter, the base trick by means of which the Pāṇḍavas defeated Bhīṣma had to be excused: the victim himself makes the suggestion and the killers cannot be criticized when they accept his suggestion.⁵⁸³

Simson no doubt saw his work as offering a “critical” explanation of the Mahābhārata’s progression. From his perspective, these hypotheses and arguments, ad hoc and subjective though they were, seemed to offer a kind of rational explanation of why certain sections of the Mahābhārata, such as the *Bhagavadgītā* and the episode of the nighttime visit to Bhīṣma, occurred where they did. Even though his arguments were quite tenuous, being self-referential circular, and completely devoid of positive verification, he likely thought that he had, in the course of his “researches” into the war books of the Mahābhārata, found at long last the key to the “interpolation” of the

580. Ibid.

581. Ibid.

582. Ibid., 172.

583. Ibid., 173.

Bhagavadgītā.⁵⁸⁴ And yet, what he did not notice was that all his arguments derived from a priori assumptions concerning the origins of the epic as a Kaurava epic and the nature of the epic as a war narrative. Every argument he provided to buttress his idea of the epic's "composition technique and genesis [Entstehungsgeschichte]" was in fact a priori. For instance, as "proof" of his thesis of the episode of the nighttime visit, he advanced the observation that "this [i.e., the motivations of the "redactors" for inserting this episode] becomes quite clear in the conversation of Yudhiṣṭhira with Droṇa, whom he visits next after Bhīṣma.... Regarding the question of how he may be defeated, Droṇa indicates the sole means that would motivate him to lay down his weapons.... To be sure, this is not as direct a demand to use an unfair trick as that in 6.103, [but] the intent of the author is manifestly the same: the justification of the ignoble [unritterlich] tactics of the Pāṇḍavas, which must have been embarrassing to the devout Brahmins of the later age."⁵⁸⁵

The more serious problem, of course, concerns Simson's anti-Brahmanism. Even though he presented his work as a contribution to "textual criticism" of the Mahābhārata, the entire reconstruction was, in fact, driven by his anti-Brahmanism. Setting out from a priori assumptions about the nature of Brahman interests, Brahman politics, and Brahman ideology, he actually geared the entire reconstruction to bear out these assumptions. Throughout his work, he repeated the motif of "Brahmanism," either referring to the addition as "a piece of Brahmanic poetry"⁵⁸⁶ or declaring that "the later Brahmanic revisionists of the *Mahābhārata* believed that they had to justify the conduct of the Pāṇḍavas during the battle"⁵⁸⁷ or claiming that responsibility for these changes had to be laid at the doorstep of the "devout Brahmins of the later age."⁵⁸⁸ In his concluding summary, he once again reprised these claims, describing the changes to the Mahābhārata as "a late piece of Brahmanic apologetics."

Let us summarize the results of our investigation: the repetitions we have discovered and the context of the initial verses of the description of battle (6.42.2)

584. Actually, his work was not even as original as he claimed. Before him, Holtzmann had already claimed that the plan to defeat Bhīṣma came, not from the grandfather, but from Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa (see Holtzmann Jr., *Arjuna. Ein Beitrag zur Reconstruction des Mahābhārata*, 25–26). According to him "the present redaction of the epic did everything possible in order to absolve its favorite, Arjuna, of all sin vis-à-vis his grandfather. In the old poem, Arjuna killed his grandfather and teacher, the unconquerable hero, through deceit following the instructions of Kṛṣṇa... [whereas] [t]he narrative of the fall of Bhīṣma, as it is present now to us in the final chapters of the sixth book, shifts all blame from Arjuna." Ibid., 27–28. For "our poem, where it really acknowledges this [i.e., that Arjuna killed Bhīṣma], says that Arjuna at least acted without sin. Hence the piece mentioned earlier in which Bhīṣma himself tells his foe of the means by which he can be killed was inserted." Ibid., 29. In fact, the only part of Holtzmann's accusations against the Pāṇḍavas Simson *did not* reprise is the former's suggestion that "possibly Arjuna's 'wrongdoing' went even further: he fought disguised as Çikhaṇḍin; the latter [disguised] as Arjuna." Ibid., 30.

585. Simson, "Die Einschaltung der *Bhagavadgītā* im *Bhīṣmaparvan* des *Mahābhārata*," 173–74.

586. Ibid., 166.

587. Ibid., 173.

588. Ibid., 174.

with a verse lying far back cast light on the technique of the later redactors of the *Mahābhārata*, who must already have had the *Mahābhārata* before them in a written form [Holtzmann's Buddhist poet!]. We have brought the first part of the inserted section (6.16.21–6.22.22) into association with the final great revision or elaboration of the report of battle for reasons pertaining to its content. In contrast, the *Bhagavadgītā*, which follows thereafter, turned out to be a later insertion because of its introduction modeled on 6.47.1ff. Likewise, in the Pāṇḍavas' visit to the enemy camp which follows after the *Bhagavadgītā*, we see a late piece of Brahmanic apologetics, which, just like the second visit to Bhīṣma (6.103.40–84), was added as a moral justification of the Pāṇḍavas.⁵⁸⁹

And then he added in a footnote to this paragraph: "The final turn to a crusader ideology [Kreuzzugsideologie] is demonstrated in 6.62.34 and 13.153.39: *yataḥ Kṛṣṇas tato dharma yato dharma tato jayaḥ*."⁵⁹⁰

It was for good reason that Simson's *Bhagavadgītā* was chosen as the final iteration of the German *Gītā* in this book. It represents the culmination of a long tradition of German anti-Brahmanic sentiment. More importantly, however, it shows that the Indologists' anti-Brahmanism was not simply an accompanying phenomenon, *but the central principle that endowed their reconstructions with legitimacy*. In the absence of this prejudice, namely, that Brahmins corrupted the texts and that they did so for ideological and apologetic reasons, their reconstructions would not have been possible. Indeed, there would have been no history to tell, because the history German Indologists were interested in telling was not objective history, *but the history of Brahman domination of India*. The history Indologists were interested in telling was essentially the history of the mind's ascent to freedom and self-determination—a history in which Brahmanism as the stage immediately preceding Western scholarship had to be seen as a stage of dogmatism and subjugation to authority. It was the main obstacle to critical thinking of the kind espoused by the Western scholars, and they did not hesitate to make the least sign of allegiance to tradition an obstacle to the respective scholar's participation in the Western "critical" enterprise. For instance, when it came to the reason why the editor of the *Mahābhārata* critical edition had rejected the reading favored by him, Simson did not simply attribute this disagreement to a difference in judgment. No, the editor's "error" (an "error" only from Simson's perspective) had to be attributable to his entanglement in tradition, an entanglement that directly affected his ability to carry out critical, methodical, self-reflexive research. Thus, placing Belvalkar in a long tradition of Brahman apologetic scholarship, Simson argued that the reason he (i.e., Belvalkar) "did not see or did not want to see the passage [i.e., 6.11.16–20, which according to him was the immediate antecedent to 6.42.2]" was because he was a "devout Hindu [frommer Hindu]."⁵⁹¹ He attributed similar motivations to Belvalkar as to the anonymous redactors of

589. Ibid., 174.

590. Ibid., 174, n. 17.

591. Ibid., 161.

the text, to whom “the ignoble [unritterlich] tactics of the Pāṇḍavas... must have been embarrassing,” and implied that even the contemporary critical edition was of a piece with the long history of the epic in which its original heroic, Kṣatriya character had been obscured in favor of a more theosophic or philosophical air. Indeed, he used practically the same expression—“devout Hindu”—to characterize the editor as he had these anonymous redactors, who were “devout Brahmins” in his argot.

There can be no more striking illustration of how German Indologists, although they thought of themselves as the epitome of secular, enlightened scholars, were in fact using ideas of critical scholarship to pursue religious, apologetic ends. Other scholars would accept their work, even welcoming their researches as scientific knowledge,⁵⁹² only because they had not understood the deeper processes at work in this tradition of scholarship. They had simply accepted the German Indologists’ narrative of an antithesis between modern, critical scholarship and traditional scholarship, where the former not only supersedes the latter but is able to reveal it for what it is. They had not examined the role played by this narrative in the Indologists’ own institutional constitution and praxis. Specifically, they had overlooked three crucial aspects of this relationship: (1) modern scholarship did not supersede traditional scholarship, but asked different sorts of questions aiming at different sorts of ends (intervention in Indian history or confirmation of a German anti-Semitic and anticlerical prejudice), (2) modern scholarship did not replace traditional scholarship, but made a different sort of knowledge available (information or data on the text rather than understanding), and (3) modern scholarship was ultimately not valued—not even among the Indologists—for the kind of knowledge it made available, but for the identity it gave the scholar (affirmation as secular, enlightened, and postconfessional).

But here, at the end of our discussion of Simson’s Gītā, itself the last in our list of German Gītās, it suffices to note that German Indologists’ “philological” tools fell far

592. See, for instance, Brockington, *The Sanskrit Epics*, 146–47 claiming that “Georg von Simson has demonstrated the mechanisms by which the *Bhagavadgītā* was included within the *Mahābhārata* and has shown that the repetition in Mbh. 6.95.4–23 of Mbh. 6.16.11–20+42.2 reveals that originally the whole block from 16.21 to 42.1 was absent; this includes most of the more extended *Bhagavadgītāparvan* (Mbh. 6.14–41), where the prediction of Bhīṣma’s death and of the mourning for him in some sense provide a specific rationale for Arjuna’s revulsion. There are in fact two stages of interpolation: the first after 6.16.20 provides the connection between Duryodhana’s speech and Duḥśāsana’s reaction to it and, through Dhṛtarāṣṭra’s question at the end of *adhyāya* 22, forms a transition to the actual start of the battle at *adhyāya* 42; at this point the second stage of interpolation inserts the *Bhagavadgītā* (Mbh. 6.23–40) and the visit of the Pāṇḍavas to Bhīṣma and the gurus, before taking up again in 6.42.1 the bridging question by Dhṛtarāṣṭra from the first stage of interpolation. A significant indicator of this process is the extent to which 6.18 borrows from elsewhere in the *parvan*, not only from 6.42 but also from later in the book. The first insertion (6.16.21–22.22) clearly occurred as part of the great revision of the *Mahābhārata* to which we owe the account of the battle in its present form, whereas the *Bhagavadgītā* is revealed by its preamble in 1.2–19, which draws on 6.47.2–30, to be later still. Also, the visit of the Pāṇḍavas to the enemy (6.41) following the *Bhagavadgītā*, forms a late piece of brāhman apologetic, which equally with the second visit to Bhīṣma (6.103.40–84) must have been inserted for the moral justification of the Pāṇḍavas.”

short of their “critical” aspirations. They could only carry out their so-called historical reconstructions of the text because these reconstructions were premised on a priori ideas of the epic’s origins. Since they all subscribed to common ideas of Āryan origins and Brahmanic corruptions, their reconstructions appeared plausible, at least within their narrow circle. And as long as these ideas were not questioned, their institutional hegemony would be secure.

As the implicit assumption underlying their reconstructions, German anti-Brahmanic sentiment thus essentially underwrote two centuries of Mahābhārata scholarship. Once this principle was questioned, however, the lacunae in their “scholarship” became glaring. As our discussion of Simson’s article demonstrates, elementary principles of scholarship such as the duty to read the manuscript evidence, not to bear false witness, and so on were sacrificed for the sake of a Lutheran agenda. Fantastic articles of faith from higher criticism overruled objective evidence. Racial or religious polemics could be disguised behind the mask of scholarship. Occasionally of course the mask would slip, as for instance when the German Indologist Peter Gaeffke launched a fulminant diatribe against calls for reform in Indian studies, targeting among others: women, ethnic Asians, American educators, university administrators, American-born Asians, and the post-Oriental critics.⁵⁹³ But on the whole, what we see is that Indology, once again in its long history, has found a way to adapt

593. See his “A Rock in the Tides of Time: Oriental Studies Then and Now,” *Academic Questions* 3, no. 2 (1990): 67–74, especially 69 (“Differences in sociological climate also played a significant role. In Europe, it was the gifted children of a middle class sympathetic to learning who found their way through the *gymnasium* to the university, eventually ascending to the prestigious position of university professor. In the United States, on the other hand, it was mostly the offspring of missionaries or clerics with an interest in and love for Eastern peoples who became Orientalists. (Later, members of ethnic groups from the Orient who had an intrinsic interest in their own traditions also undertook the serious study of classical Eastern languages.) Furthermore, due to the more private character of higher education in the United States and its dependence on irregular public funding, Oriental studies developed more erratically than on the Continent, and consequently was, and is, more vulnerable to internal and external pressures.”), 71 (“Serious scholars in the East familiar with the work of Western Orientalists published in French, German, Italian, and Russian, wisely refrained from such ‘Orientalist-bashing,’ for they knew that more than blind resentment and unfocused anger about postcolonial politics were need to unhinge two hundred years of scholarship. Indeed, Edward Said, a Palestinian of Christian ancestry, who has served as a progenitor of this line of anti-Orientalist propaganda, has offered neither a well-argued, nor a scholarly alternative theory about the origins and history of Islam. As a professor of English, and not particularly knowledgeable in the field of Oriental studies, he is incapable of such an achievement.”), 72 (“That such a superficial and politically motivated critique of Oriental studies could be taken seriously reflects the peculiar situation of the American scene in which one finds a large immigrant population of native speakers of Eastern languages, and a heightened demand for professors in various fields of Oriental learning where trained Americans are scarce. Part of the blame for this situation has to be placed on the deplorable state of secondary education in the United States (increasingly emulated in most European countries) which has led to a shortage of motivated students with a sound basis in several Western languages, and a rudimentary knowledge of at least one Eastern tongue. In addition, very few *colleges* encourage students to learn more than one foreign language of any sort. The result is that American Ph.D.’s—especially in the social sciences, but also in the disciplines of Oriental learning—often

to the prevailing intellectual and social climate. It entered into an implicit bargain with the public whereby, in exchange for distancing itself from the more rabid utterances of some of its members, it is permitted to continue producing essentially the same kind of knowledge subscribing to the same kind of ideology.⁵⁹⁴

Yet as often as these gestures of ideological purification were repeated, at its core Indology remained committed to three principles:

1. The first was that native scholars, irrespective of whether they actually subscribed to the commentarial tradition or were simply “colored,” would always be subject to a heightened suspicion. They would at every turn have to engage in hyperbolic criticisms of the tradition, up to and including rehashing Western arguments about what set critical consciousness apart from traditional scholarship. In effect, they would be placed under a double restriction: to deny not only whatever was traditional about them, but also to exercise the same kind of supervision over other native scholars. Under pain of themselves being labeled “uncritical,” they would be expected to integrate themselves into the academic hegemony. Some of the most vehement accusations of the native tradition would come from these native scholars. (The German scholars, not realizing the institutional, dogmatic pressures that had compelled them to this amicide, would, of course, seize upon this as confirmation of their views.⁵⁹⁵)

lack a linguistic base broad enough for a comprehensive knowledge of an Eastern culture. . . . Thus, instead of patiently grooming their few linguistically gifted students, some universities have taken a short cut and employed insufficiently trained largely because they can also speak English. This has resulted in both a lowering of standards in many institutions and an unnecessary and unwanted specialization, giving weight to Nietzsche’s earlier criticism.”), and 73–74 (“Unfortunately, it has already become a fact that hiring decisions regarding Asian area specialists in social science departments are made without consulting its Orientalists. As a result, an increasing crowd of deconstructionists may soon claim exclusive rights to explain the Orient to us. Another danger to Oriental studies has taken shape because of university affirmative action policy. While most Western Orientalists are indeed white males, the number of excellent women in the field is by no means insignificant. . . . The difference between these scholars and those recruited through affirmative action programs is that the former attained their positions under the same conditions and standards as other Orientalists. Yet nowadays we hear that Oriental studies departments should hire more women “to bring in new and creative viewpoints.”

594. Occasionally, this could take extreme forms, such as the complete sacrifice of Hauer to the Germanists as the price for preserving Indology’s ideological unimpeachability; for relevant passages, see Reinhold Grünendahl, “Wissenschaftsgeschichte im Schatten postorientalistischer De/Konstruktion,” *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung* 103, no. 4–5 (2008): 468–77 and see also Hanneder, *Marburger Indologie im Umbruch*, 51–62. The implicit logic appears to be: if he was a Nazi, he was not one of us (but his “science” was wonderful nonetheless).

595. See Hanneder’s recent review of *The Pandit: Traditional Scholarship in India* in *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 155 (2001): 671–72, seizing upon Aklujkar’s article (Ashok Aklujkar, “The Pandits from a *pinḍa-brahmāṇḍa* Point of View,” in *The Pandit: Traditional Scholarship in India*, ed. Michael Axels [Delhi: Manohar, 2001], 41–59) as support for his view that “the tension between the two methods of scholarship [i.e., between traditional Indian and Western academic scholarship] . . . is in some respects

2. The second principle was that no source of reflection, of normative concern, could be brought from the outside to challenge the sense of superiority of the Indologists. The source of their sense of superiority manifestly did not lie in engagement with Brahmanic theology. As we have seen, there was no such engagement. On the contrary, Indologists invoked the ideology of critique precisely in order to avoid such an engagement. If historical consciousness, as the latest stage of the evolution of the human mind, had superseded and encompassed all earlier stages within itself, what need could there be for an engagement with these stages? What need was there to talk to the native tradition? And thus, by activating a narrative of the necessary evolution of human reason (culminating, of course, in the critic's own present), German Indologists were able to forego an engagement with Indian theology, even as what they were doing was theological through and through.
3. The third principle relates to what scholars have referred to as the triumph of historical consciousness. Myers notes: "as a mode of cognition, historicism has been a remarkable success story. It has come to dominate our way of thinking about the past, conditioning us to place the single event in context and then link it to a chain of other contextually bound events. Its ubiquity has also bestowed a

similar to the relationship between theology and 'Religionswissenschaft.' Theology conceived as the academic side of the practice of a religion can include a scientific investigation of the subject, but for a theologian his subject will always be more than 'just' a topic for research. In a similar way, the pandit's proficiency in a subject is often coupled, as Aklujkar points out, with a certain way of life and it may be difficult to divorce the academic aspect from the Pandit identity. Since he is supposed not only to function as a mere scholar, his view of the culture he embodies through his erudition is necessarily more holistic. 'Western' Indology with its specifically historically oriented, critical approach, had to make use of the Indian *pāṇḍitya* in order to get, as much as possible, first hand information, but it could not accept its theological dimension without compromising its aims as a historical subject. Since this source of misunderstanding persists until to date, it should be made clear that the 'Western' approach is not to belittle traditional Indian learning, but a methodological necessity." Hanneder, Review of *The Pandit*, 672. In point of fact, however, what Aklujkar says is quite different. Far from claiming that the pandit is unable "to divorce the academic aspect from the Pandit identity," he questions the ground of the opposition, demonstrating that academic scholarship too is not without its presuppositions. When he notes that "something in their education [i.e., in the pandits' education] is seen as preventing them from studying things diachronically or with a detachment expected of a historian. They are, at least implicitly, thought of as prone to cultivating knowledge with faith or in an eternalistic mode" (Aklujkar, "The Pandits from a *piṇḍa-brahmāṇḍa* Point of View," 47), it is clear that the argument at this stage is dialectical. The reference is actually to *Western* assumptions of the shortcomings of traditional scholarship, assumptions Aklujkar rejects (see, for instance, n. 16 on the same page, where he notes that "the phenomenon [of thinking the pandits cannot be treated on par with Western, historically trained scholars] is related to colonialistic assumptions, to the creation of tagged 'pandit' positions in Indian colleges and universities and to the holding of separate *paṇḍita-pariṣads* in the sessions of the All-India Oriental Conference, World Sanskrit Conference etc..."). When he further notes that he "should not be understood as holding that Western scholars, as a rule or almost always handle the historical method well," he is in fact raising criticisms in tune with our book (see also the comments on pp. 50–51 questioning the absolute significance assigned "history").

dignified status onto a field of inquiry once deemed a second-tier discipline. . . .⁵⁹⁶ The triumph of historicism has often been celebrated as offering a neutral space for dialogue with different traditions. Yet, as Levenson has exposed in a brilliantly argued piece, this is not true. "Historicism is not without assumptions of its own."⁵⁹⁷ Levenson's conclusion is thought-provoking, and bears repeating: "The belief that the real meaning of religious phenomena is available only to the outside observer is a secular analogue to religious revelation. If so, then a system of thought like historicism, which 'exempts itself from its own verdict,' is a secular equivalent to fundamentalism. For though it subjects all else to critique, it asserts axiomatically its own inviolability to critique. Demanding to be the norm by means of which truth and error are disclosed, this type of thinking, by definition, can never be in error."⁵⁹⁸

Within Indology, we have seen how those assumptions entailed not only ideas of how texts are to be studied and what questions are worth raising, but also ideas of the corruption and bastardization of the Indian people, of their inability to carry out independent, self-critical researches, and of the need for Western, especially German, critical intervention in their texts. The historicism they practiced was not even the kind of historicism seen in biblical criticism (where it is a matter of an intra-Christian debate about the correct approach to scripture). Rather, this was historicism buttressed by a colonial consciousness. In the field of Indian studies, the triumph of historicism, then, would not mean a development or synthesis of existing modes of understanding or scholarship available within an existing tradition (this argument could perhaps be made for Europe), but would necessarily entail the destruction of an entire alternative tradition of scholarship. Next to the Lutheran deconstruction of Greek ontology and of the Scholastic theology based upon it, we would be hard pressed to find a more striking example of how theological concerns led to the erasure of an entire alternative intellectual tradition—that "other philology" as we have called it, whose roots are not Lutheran but ancient Greek, Platonic, or Indian, and whose origins lie not in the certitude of being always already saved but in the argument for the immortality of the soul.⁵⁹⁹

Indian scholars, looking to say something about their tradition, now found themselves stepping on precarious terrain. If, on the one hand, they raised criticisms from the perspective of their own normative and philosophical concerns, they risked being labeled "fundamentalists" or "religious zealots," or at the very least "uncritical." If, on the other hand, they did not raise such criticisms, they risked giving tacit assent to the dominant paradigm. Since historicism as a mode of thought largely depends for

596. David N. Myers, *Resisting History: Historicism and its Discontents in Jewish-German Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 5.

597. Levenson, *The Hebrew Bible*, 119 (and for the full argument, see *ibid.*, 118–20).

598. *Ibid.*, 117.

599. There is a link of course. German Indologists, as we have seen in this section, were essentially fulfilling Luther's program when they embarked upon their project of reading Indian texts independent of their ethical, philosophical, and soteriological concerns.

its legitimacy upon its aura of inevitability, this was tantamount to reinforcing the German scholars' sense that their approach had superseded all others. Under these circumstances, their demand of Indian scholars that they reject and distance themselves from the native tradition could now appear as a legitimate requirement rather than the hegemonic demand that in truth it was. The method had become autonomous.

THE PREJUDICES ARE INSTITUTIONALIZED

Although the system of compulsions German scholars placed Indian scholars under was intricate, it did not operate by itself. On the contrary, it required a concerted effort to apply pressure at the key junctures: a statement of method here, a clarification of the difference between pandithood and historical scholarship there, a foreword or an introduction accusing the tradition of relativism, a dismissal of all Indian scholarship out of hand, and so on. Thus, we should first look at some of these statements, before considering some of their consequences for the field of Indian studies. We begin with the words of Stietencron, already alluded to several times in the course of this work:

The analytical thinking of Western scholars trained in historical and philological methodology stood in contrast to the traditional Indian commentators. The latter not only generously harmonized all the disjunctions in the text but, above all, attempted to recognise in particular passages of the text their own philosophical and theological concepts. This was done in order to secure for themselves the divine authority of Kṛṣṇa. In this manner, several philosophical schools developed Gītā interpretations of their own—a spectrum that has been further expanded through politically motivated, modern interpretations since the beginning of the Indian independence struggle.⁶⁰⁰

Stietencron's words were followed by several others, among them Malinar (in the revised English edition of her book on the Bhagavadgītā) and Hanneder (in a review of Malinar).⁶⁰¹ First, the comment by Malinar:

It [i.e., her book] is not an account of the *BhG*'s 'history of reception', therefore neither the later Sanskrit tradition of commentary nor modern Hindu interpretations of the text are included since each author establishes his own hermeneutics on the basis of the religious or philosophical tradition he adheres to.⁶⁰²

And, thereafter, that by Hanneder:

600. Heinrich von Stietencron, "Editor's Introduction," in Angelika Malinar, *Rājavidyā: Das königliche Wissen um Herrschaft und Verzicht* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1996), 6–7.

601. Earlier examples are of course legion (see, for instance, Jarl Charpentier, "Some Remarks on the *Bhagavadgita*," *The Indian Antiquary* LIX [1930]: 46), but we have chosen to focus on recent examples as a way of demonstrating the currency of the problem.

602. Malinar, *The Bhagavadgītā*, 17. For a detailed evaluation of these comments, especially as they relate to her decision to translate *rājavidyā* by "knowledge of kings" or "royal knowledge," see Vishwa Adluri, Review of *The Bhagavadgītā: Doctrines and Context*, by Angelika Malinar, *History of Religions* 50, no. 1 (2010): 102–7.

Even though this reviewer is not familiar with the field and [hence] does not see himself in a position to present a well-founded comprehensive evaluation of the results of this work, some critical questions, which came up during reading, are raised here. Although [it is] completely understandable in light of the extent and the amount of preliminary work to be done, the systematic exclusion of the classical Indian tradition of commentary [such as is undertaken by Malinar] is a possible methodological weakness. For, one can hardly counter a biased [tendenziösen] interpretation by native commentators by excluding it; otherwise, one exposes oneself to the danger of also eliminating the specifically Indian “horizon of understanding” along with the native reception, which [horizon] may possibly preserve something historically correct [historisch Richtiges].⁶⁰³

These comments and others like them, echoed and magnified in countless citations, journals, and even conferences, set the basic tenor for an Indology that had now become a form of cultural apartheid. Even when scholars did not explicitly voice these sentiments (and we are convinced that with the exception of a few ideologues, most scholars were only following German Indology because it was the dominant approach), their writings and attitudes practically incarnated them. It was not necessary for scholars to explicitly engage in polemics against the tradition of native Indian scholarship. As was noted, by the mid-twentieth century most of the work to deconstruct the tradition had been done and scholars were free to begin on fresh ground, as though the tradition had never existed. Thus, whereas an earlier generation of scholars such as Roth and Garbe had found themselves to be in competition with the learned pandits of Benares (and therefore felt the need for extensive documents refuting or critiquing or mocking them), by the twentieth century the struggle for authority over these Indian texts had been settled. A massive transfer of epistemic authority had taken place from the Brahmins, the traditional preservers and interpreters of these texts, to the modern critic. But in the very act of setting out from a specific range of problems, in the very act of considering some questions to be worth asking (a text’s date or authorship, is it a composite or an interpolated work, what ideologies or sectarian groups are represented in it, etc.) and others not (what was its ontology, how it could be efficacious in salvation, how it offered avenues for self-transformation), scholars were now manifesting their beholdenness to this new tradition. Without knowing it, and thinking they were surveying the Indian texts from a timeless perspective, they were actually giving testimony to the triumph of German Indology over the tradition. The prejudices were institutionalized.

AN ESSAY IN UNDERSTANDING?

At the end of this long review, extending across three chapters, of German scholarship on the Mahābharatā and Bhagavadgītā, what conclusions can we draw for the wider phenomenon known as German Indology? As we have shown, Indology

603. Hanneder, Review of *Rājavidyā: Das königliche Wissen um Herrschaft und Verzicht*, 240.

cannot be adequately understood in terms of an institutional tradition or even in terms of a body of (scientific) literature. Even though these aspects doubtless existed and were essential for its public visibility, they were in a sense secondary to the ideological aspects of the discipline. Nor can Indology be understood in terms of a tradition of critical scholarship, for, as we have seen, what was specifically “critical” about this scholarship was not its methods or its results (which were often arbitrary, inconsistent, and prejudicial) but its application of a “hermeneutics of suspicion.” A hermeneutics of suspicion is the view that the received narrative cannot be accepted at face value. Hence, it must be negated in its content to reveal a deeper imperative or imperatives that it is unaware of. In the case of the Indologists, they saw their task as essentially one of bringing to light a truth that the tradition had either forgotten or tried to elide. In the case of the Mahābhārata, this was the truth that the epic was essentially a historical recollection; in the case of the Bhagavadgītā, that the poem was a composite text, that it lacked a coherent theology, and that it hence could not be efficacious in salvation. The specific details of the “truth” discovered in each case, however, were less important than the underlying assumption that the tradition was the product of a false consciousness. This tradition was therefore *fundamentally* in error—and not just in one or more incidental aspects. Indeed, it was not just in error, but in untruth, suspected not simply of committing an error but of *being the error*. No engagement with tradition was possible, because to engage with it was to dignify falsehood and to readmit to the circle of possible discourse false doctrines. Can it surprise us, then, that Indology, in its inception, manifested as an extreme reflex against of tradition?

Thus, what is ultimately at stake in the encounter between Western and Eastern scholarship is not simply the engagement with an alternative scriptural hermeneutics (alternative, that is, to Protestant scriptural hermeneutics). Rather, at stake is the very possibility of discriminating between truth and error—in Foucault’s terms of establishing “the ensemble of rules according to which the true and the false are separated and specific effects of power attached to the true.”⁶⁰⁴ The tradition is *by definition* dogmatic, blind, erroneous, and misleading. In contrast, modern scholarship, as the antithesis to tradition, is *by definition* critical, self-aware, scientific, and objective.⁶⁰⁵

604. Michel Foucault, “Truth and Power,” in *Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984*, ed. Paul Rabinow, vol. 3, *Power*, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: New Press, 2000), 132.

605. This fact must be borne in mind when evaluating why German scholars developed such a wide-ranging and sophisticated response to Indian tradition. As has been noted, of all countries in Europe it was precisely Germany that invested the most time, effort, and money in the development of Sanskrit studies (see McGetchin’s and Rabault-F Feuerhahn’s respective books, both cited earlier). This fact cannot be ascribed simply to the Germans’ penchant for dressing up in costume (alongside Āryanism, there were several other contenders for the role of German identity as detailed by Goodrick-Clarke in his book; Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism: Secret Aryan Cults and their Influence on Nazi Ideology* [New York: New York University Press, 2005]). Rather, what is entailed in the engagement with Indian antiquity and *mutatis mutandis* with antiquity of any kind is the very possibility of constituting oneself as critical, self-aware, and scientific.

Under these conditions, who could wish to take sides with tradition in the struggle for truth? But before we give our assent to this narrative (and join the German Indologists in their overhasty dismissal of tradition), it is worthwhile to examine its consequences for our understanding of the texts and of ourselves. We shall focus here on two facets: (1) the disenfranchisement of the text and its consequences for Hindu theology, (2) the rise of Indology and its consequences for Western scholars' understanding of Indian texts, and (3) rethinking our engagement with Indian texts after Indology.

1. The Disenfranchisement of the Text and its Consequences for Hindu Theology

The application of a hermeneutics of suspicion to the text appears, initially, to be incomparably more sophisticated than a straightforward reading of the text. Such a hermeneutics might justly be considered one of the founding intellectual gestures of our age. In our modern age, there is no accusation we fear more than that of *Unmündigkeit* (naïveté or lack of maturity, understood as the bond of faith in spiritual authority). Yet one of the inescapable consequences of the hermeneutics of suspicion is that it introduces a disparity between the critic and the text. As S. J. McGrath writes:

A hermeneutics of suspicion is necessary when reason is not in command of the discourse but is the product of "false consciousness." The most explicit example of how this works is classical psychoanalysis. In the Freudian model the analyst and the analysand are not on equal footing. Assuming that the analysand is lying both to himself and to her, the analyst is primarily concerned not with what the analysand says but with how he says it. In the sutures of the analysand's narratives the analyst traces the hidden motives holding his illusion together. The relation is non-dialogical, or one-sided. The analyst gives little of herself to the relationship while the analysand must be trusted to hold nothing back if the cure is to work. . . . The analysand is on trial; his language is not taken at face value. He is denied rationality, the ability to say what he means and mean what he says. His discourse is interpreted in light of assumptions that the analyst makes without telling him; his narrative is understood in terms of unconscious motives that are assumed to be revealed and concealed in the way he speaks or refuses to speak.⁶⁰⁶

The application of a hermeneutics of suspicion is justified only where we have reason to believe that the text is a product of false consciousness, that is to say, where we suspect that we are being lied to. But in the case of Indian tradition the only reason,

606. S. J. McGrath, *Heidegger: A Very Critical Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), 4–5.

historically speaking, for the application of a hermeneutics of suspicion was that the texts were assumed to espouse false doctrines and that they were assumed to be priestly products. Both reasons are in fact theological assumptions, raised from the perspective of a Protestant critique of religion. They were never actually shown to be true of Indian texts. Although every German scholar set out from the assumption that Indian texts were corrupt, no scholar actually tried to demonstrate in what way this was so.⁶⁰⁷ (Corruption—that theological cipher par excellence—was transformed into the philological category par excellence and yet lost none of its ethical overtones.) Indeed, as we have seen, German Indologists went out of their way to evade an engagement with the Bhagavadgītā's philosophy. Under the pretense of a critical analysis of the text, they in fact set aside the question of its truth-claims. The text was reduced—in the strict sense of Freudian psychoanalysis—to the analysand. The application of a hermeneutics of suspicion to the Bhagavadgītā had the effect of denying it any meaning or value and, above all, any philosophical or ethical dimension.⁶⁰⁸

Once this was done to one of the central scriptural texts of Indian tradition, an engagement with Hindu theology also became superfluous. It was no longer necessary for German Indologists to engage in long study of Indians texts. as had an earlier generation of scholars such as the Jesuit missionaries Thomas Stephens (1549–1619) and Étienne de la Croix (1579–1643) encountered a literary tradition that was still vital. Both scholars produced their own Purāṇas—the former a Christa Purāṇa in 1616 and the latter a Peter Purāṇa in 1629—showing that this genre was still vital as late as the seventeenth century.⁶⁰⁹ Arriving in India, Western missionaries still felt a

607. To be sure, German Indologists buttressed this assumption with all sorts of positive “evidence” (we need only think of the narratives of Holtzmann, of Garbe, of Otto, of Hauer, of Simson, and so on). But insofar as this “evidence” mainly consisted in stating in the form of conclusions what was already assumed as the incontrovertible truth about Indian tradition, it remains true that a demonstration of the false and misleading nature of Indian scriptures remains to be undertaken even to the present day. (In point of fact, the only place where such demonstrations were undertaken was in the writings of the missionaries and the publications of the Christian Literature Society and allied associations. These works, including the extensive publications of the CLS on the Bhagavadgītā, are deserving of a separate and even more thoroughgoing study, because they truly give expression to what the Indologists were trying to accomplish in a confused and self-deluded way. The missionaries had this advantage that they were unimpeded by the secularization narrative the Indologists had in the meanwhile told themselves.)

608. The exclusion of especially philosophical and ontological insights does not confer scientificity on an arbitrary method and yet this was the fundamental assumption that underwrote Indology, its birth hour so to speak.

609. The former was called a Purāṇa only from its 1649 edition onward; its original title was *Discursos sobre a vida de Jesu Christo nosso salvador ao mundo, dividido em dous tratados* or *Discourse on the Coming of Jesus Christ our Savior into the World, divided into Two Treatises*. The latter was never officially called a Purāṇa; its official title was *Discursos sobre a vida do Apostolo Sam Pedro em que se refutam os principais erros do gentilismo deste Oriente* or *Discourse on the Life of Apostle St. Peter in which are refuted the Chief Errors of the Religion of the Gentiles*. See Ludo Rocher, *The Purāṇas* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1986), 74–75.

need to engage with Purāṇic literature as a source of theological and salvific authority, even though this engagement was characterized by religious rivalry. It is only with the advent of historical-criticism that the question of the theological and salvific significance of these texts could be set aside—not through demonstrating that they were erroneous, but through setting that question itself aside as no longer relevant in the wake of the Lutheran equation of faith with salvation. In effect, German Indologists—though interested “solely” in the “philological” question of the original form of the text—had accomplished something Jesuit missionaries over generations had struggled to do: they had found a way to make Hindu theology—at least from the perspective of those who were always already saved—redundant.

2. The Rise of Indology and its Consequences for Western Scholars’ Understanding of Indian Texts

As problematic as this evangelical aspect of Indology was, its impact on the praxis of reading texts was ultimately more damaging for intellectual history. Indology was baleful not only for Indian tradition but also for the Western understanding of Indian texts. Although the German engagement with Indian texts began in the context of more wide-ranging philosophical, literary, and theosophic explorations, the emergence of this new class of professional interpreters seriously restricted Western authors’ scope for reading the texts. They now had to overcome not only a cultural and linguistic barrier but also these new professionals, who had in the meanwhile inserted themselves between the texts and the reading public. Thus while it was still possible for Goethe, Schopenhauer, and Schlegel to approach Indian texts with a certain degree of freshness and wonder—leading to creative encounters such as Schopenhauer’s appropriation of the Indian concept of *māyā* in his *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* or Goethe’s appropriation of the opening of Kalidāsa’s *Śakuntalā* in his *Faust*—once the Indologists arrive on the scene, we find German interest in Indian thought decreasing to an ever smaller circle of specialist problems. In seizing the Indian texts, the Indologists impoverished not only Indian tradition but also German cultural life. As they consolidated authority in their hands and moved aggressively into the university, demanding their own departments and titles, they effectively ended the brief but extremely rich encounter between Eastern and Western thought that had been a hallmark of the Goethezeit. In place of the imaginings of dramatists, philosophers, poets, or statesmen, a small class of bureaucrats entrenched itself—jealous of its privileges, practicing an esoteric and undefined method, and reacting with extreme belligerence toward any attempt to illuminate its praxis.⁶¹⁰

610. See Walter Slaje, “Was ist und welchem Zwecke dient die Indologie,” *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 153 (2003): 311–31, especially 311 for the text of an imagined exchange between an Indologist and the layperson in which the layperson is described as “the Evil One [Gottseibeius; colloquial figure of speech for the Devil]” and 312 for the accusation that the raising of “utilitarian and commercial *whys?* and *how much?*” with respect to “scientific research and education” is evidence that a “palpable educational

Herling has recently proposed that we look at the German engagement with the Bhagavadgītā in terms of a dialectical process.⁶¹¹ According to him, we need not choose between the alternatives of either a hermeneutical consciousness or a critical consciousness, as formulated by Ricoeur.⁶¹² Rather, he suggests that we look at the history of German scholarship on the Bhagavadgītā as a story of unavoidable misconceptions, leading to many flawed interpretations, but on the whole carried forward by a genuine interest in comprehending the Indian text. Herling's view thus echoes the stance of Wilhelm Halbfass, who writes:

There is certainly no coherent history of [the] European search for India. Yet, there is an identifiable historical path leading to the situation of modern Indological research and of intercultural communication. It is a process which accompanies and reflects the development of European thought in general—a process in which Europe has defined and questioned itself, and in which misunderstandings and prejudices may be as significant as the accumulation of factual truth and correct information.⁶¹³

For Herling, “misapprehensions . . . are [thus] affirmed as part of this dialogical process as the interpreter ‘reintegrate[s] misunderstanding into understanding by the very movement of question and answer’.”⁶¹⁴ He sees the German encounter with the Bhagavadgītā as an essentially sincere, benign process, hampered only by its deficits of knowledge about the text. Thus he sums up, “German Orientalist understanding of India was never purely a function of power, nor did it always make progress; the truth resides somewhere between.”⁶¹⁵

Unfortunately, Herling's account does not work. As we have seen, there was no progress in the German understanding of either the Mahābhārata or the Bhagavadgītā. More importantly, there was no desire for progress, measured as a desire to understand the text. Nearly a hundred years after the German experiment with the texts first got underway, German scholars were still repeating clichés of unscrupulous Brahmins who had taken over a heroic Kṣatriya text and/or puzzling over whether the theistic or pantheistic “layers” of the poem were more original. They were simply unable to see that the idea of a heroic Kṣatriya epic had originated

deficit has long since begun to make its effects felt in the universities and educational ministries [of the country].” And see also *ibid.*, 314 for objections to the “fundamental intellectual categories and commercial principles of operation” of a “mercantile class” that have in the meanwhile begun to threaten “intellectual freedom at the universities.”

611. Bradley L. Herling, “Either a Hermeneutical Consciousness or a Critical Consciousness: Renegotiating Theories of the Germany-India Encounter,” *The Comparatist* 34 (2010): 63–79.

612. *Ibid.*, 63–64. The reference is to Paul Ricoeur, “Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology,” in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, ed. and trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 63–100.

613. Halbfass, *India and Europe*, 434–435.

614. Herling, “Either a Hermeneutical Consciousness or a Critical Consciousness,” 63; the quotation is from Ricoeur, “Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology,” 83.

615. *Ibid.*, 77.

in a German prejudice against the priesthood and that the term *pantheism* had first acquired significance for the Bhagavadgītā in the context of a German critique of Catholicism. Further, contrary to Herling's account of "misapprehensions" being reintegrated into the interpretive effort on the way to a better understanding, we found that no German scholar actually made productive use of the misapprehensions of his predecessor. Indeed, earlier interpretations appeared as misapprehensions to the respective scholar only because they were at odds with his own equally idiosyncratic theory and not because he had realized their fundamental variance from the meaning of the Bhagavadgītā. On a more technical level, it is difficult to speak of progress in understanding the Bhagavadgītā within this discipline, because scholars could not even agree on a basic text of the poem. For all that they claimed to be offering an interpretation of *the* Bhagavadgītā, they were actually interpreting (if we can call it that) vastly different texts. Likewise, we also cannot make the case that the quality of the philological work done improved over this period, since one of the latest Bhagavadgītā interpretations reconstructs the Indian epic, not on the basis of the available manuscript evidence (i.e., whether the Bhagavadgītā occurs in all manuscripts of the Mahābhārata collated for the critical edition), but on the basis of a convenient theory about the potential addressee of a passage rejected from the critical edition of the text. And as for Sanskrit, the Indologists—as they were only too well aware—would always come a distant second to the traditional speakers of the language.⁶¹⁶

3. Rethinking our engagement with Indian texts after Indology

These problems with the standard account of the Western discovery and of engagement with the Orient suggest that we might start looking for alternative ways to characterize German Gītā scholarship. On the basis of the extensive reconstructions of this chapter and the last, we can now identify a few salient features characteristic not only of this scholarship but also—assuming German Gītā scholarship is a fair representative of the wider tradition—of German Indology as a whole. With this we simultaneously conclude our historical presentation of German Indology is; in the remaining two chapters, we shall move on to an evaluation.

616. This anxiety haunts German Indology from its first moments (see the comments by Goldstücker, cited earlier) to its latest (see the comments by Gaeffke, also cited earlier). It is the root anxiety, explaining not only much of Indology's polemics against Indian tradition, but also its need to create new ideals of specialization. The anxiety so besets Indology that it even becomes the subject of worried reflections in a satirical journal: a student wonders aloud whether she might not be better off learning Sanskrit in India ("Lieber Vidūṣaka, mein Professor sagt immer, nur in Indien könne man Sanskrit richtig erlernen, weil ja die Sprache von dort kommt. Was meinst Du? Weißt Du Rat? Deine treue Leserin Sabine F. aus H.") and Vidūṣaka, a kind of agony aunt for Indologists, reassures her that the fact that birds can chirp does not make them ornithologists ("Sind Vögel Ornithologen, weil sie zwitschern?"). Letter to Vidūṣaka, *Der Vidūṣaka. Herausgegeben vom Weimarschen Indologenkreis* 4 (2010): 2; <http://vidushaka.de/Vidusaka-4.pdf>.

1. A desire to appropriate Indian texts. As we have seen, German scholars were not interested in texts for the sake of the texts. They took up the study of the Mahābhārata and the Bhagavadgītā only insofar as these texts could be used to confirm ideas of the German people. As Holtzmann Sr. put it at the outset of the German experiment with the Mahābhārata: “The legends I recount here are thus in a certain sense our property; they are to an extent Ur-German [urdeutsch], albeit already with a completely Indian coloring; and it is therefore appropriate that we Germans are the first in Europe to open our ears and hearts to these sounds of the deeper [i.e., more ancient] Orient.”⁶¹⁷
2. A desire to use these texts to reflect (ideas of) German culture. From Herder to Hauer (with the possible exception of Humboldt), German scholars were only interested in using the texts to make one or more polemical points against perceived flaws in German culture. For Herder, concerned with the separation of reason and feeling in the Enlightenment, India offered the paradigmatic example of a holistic culture in which the separation of immediate forms of intuition (sensation, perception, feeling) from mediated forms of knowledge (reason, understanding) was yet to occur. For Schlegel, concerned with the dominance of Protestantism, India offered the paradigmatic example of a decadent culture in which the rise of rationalistic strains of thought had led to spiritual enervation, ending in pantheism. For Holtzmann, Garbe, Jacobi, Oldenberg, Otto, and Hauer, the Gītā likewise offered an occasion to make polemical points about one or more facets of their own tradition. To borrow Jacobi’s expression, German Gītā scholarship can best be understood as a series of (dead) letters passed by Western authors to each other “under the rose of friendship.”
3. Absence of shared effort: If Gadamer’s analysis of “play” as the “mode of being of the work of art itself” is correct, there must be always be a shared goal in any hermeneutic enterprise.⁶¹⁸ This goal—playing—itself determines the participants and their play. Play has no end outside of itself. In the case of German Gītā scholarship, there was no such goal. No German Gītā interpreter was willing to risk himself in the play. Contrary to Herling’s account of an essentially integrative effort, there was no cumulative effort at understanding in the history of the German reception of the Bhagavadgītā. Every scholar was essentially playing only with himself. It was as though Garbe, throwing a ball at Jacobi, was surprised to find a shuttlecock being thrown back at him.
4. Hypertrophied self-consciousness, bordering on a narcissistic disorder: Again, contrary to Herling’s account, no scholar made productive use of the effort at understanding of his predecessor. Rather, each made use of his predecessor’s work as a foil against which to show off his own brilliance. Thus, at the end of a two-century period, we find only a series of assertions and no attempt at integrating them into a coherent hermeneutic theory. Instead of a single effort oriented toward a single goal (i.e., understanding the Indian poem), German Gītā

617. Holtzmann Sr., *Indische Sagen*, xxxii.

618. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Continuum, 2004), 106.

scholarship fractured into a series of efforts, each oriented toward a different goal (i.e., affirmation of Protestant faith, establishment of primordial Germanic religion, and so on). The German experiment with the Bhagavadgītā offers us the paradigmatic example of the negation of Gadamer's principle of "the *primacy of play over the consciousness of the player*."⁶¹⁹ For each of the participants in this tradition, it was more important to affirm his self-consciousness than to enter the play. Thus, criticism of the tradition was extended even to his immediate tradition (i.e., the scholar who just preceded him). This kind of hypertrophied critical consciousness is, of course, the opposite of what Gadamer means when he uses the term.⁶²⁰

5. We also find a complete lack of understanding of the concerns of Indian commentators, who were now collectively labeled "dogmatic." Even though native commentators had spent over a thousand years glossing over these texts, few German Indologists were willing to let themselves be guided by them. The commentators had debated their meaning down to minute details (Indian commentators tend to gloss the text word-by-word so that even innocuous seeming particles can be assigned enormous significance). They had worked out extraordinarily sophisticated hermeneutic theories—theories that were by no means dogmatic. Rather, questions about the nature of ultimate reality, about the nature of the first principle (whether one or many, eternally independent of the manifest creation or involved in it in some way, whether partless or not, and so on) had been raised in the context of logical, ontological, epistemological, and ethical discussions—the whole always undergirded by the touchstone of personal verification (*svānubhāva*). And yet, such was the rhetorical potential of the new ideology of critique that their work was swept away without thinking. By dismissing this knowledge, and seeking to create in its place an ersatz intellectual tradition, however, German Indologists did themselves no favor. Their trivial discoveries such as the fact that an identical word or phrase also occurred in another text could not replace centuries of exegesis and philosophical debate. Indeed, German Indologists were never able to explain why exactly scholarship had to begin anew—as though no one had attempted to clarify these texts before. As a group, they were willing only to acknowledge the work of their German predecessors (Lassen, Roth, Weber, and so on), often in hyperbolic terms. The loss ultimately was not so much the tradition's, but the Indologists', because it limited their insight into the texts.
6. Desire to dominate: From the perspective of critical theory, the objections are even more damaging. German Indological scholarship was essentially a discourse of domination and dispossession.⁶²¹ As we have seen from the beginning, its aim was

619. Ibid., 109 (Gadamer's italics).

620. See *ibid.*, xxiv: "A new critical consciousness must now accompany all responsible philosophizing which takes the habits of thought and language built up in the individual in his communication with his environment and places them before the forum of the historical tradition to which we all belong."

621. In addition to the passage from Holtzmann Sr., cited earlier, see also Hermann Oldenberg's comments in "Über Sanskritforschung," *Deutsche Rundschau* 47 (1886): 386–409; Oldenberg claims that while physical possession of India "can never be the case for

to control rather than to understand the Indian textual tradition. As Williamson has shown, Indian texts arrived in Germany in the context of a renewed national preoccupation with itself.⁶²² Thus, from the beginning, German Indological scholarship placed its technical expertise wholly in the service of nationalistic concerns. Even though it proclaimed itself the “science of India,” it was actually unconcerned with the reality of India. Efforts to actually understand Indians, to enter into contact with them were few and far between, and remain so to this day.⁶²³ (Indeed, as we shall see in the fifth chapter, German distance from India was such that Oldenberg was forced to make a methodological principle of it.)

7. Lack of any positive, humanistic contribution. Further, for all that German Indologists claimed to be concerned with Brahmanic oppression of the lower castes, they made no serious efforts at its abatement. Their Brahmins were creatures of their own imagination, caricatures of rabbis drawn with brown chalk.⁶²⁴ None of the Indologists we studied in this book undertook sociological or ethnographic researches on the Brahmins. The few who had had firsthand encounters with them, such as Garbe, saw that the Brahmins were highly regarded individuals in their communities, and nonetheless came back and wrote books affirming European/German stereotypes of the Brahmins. For all their feigned morality, Indologists did not contribute in any positive way to the alleviation of India’s social problems. Rather, the implicit bargain was that in return for being uplifted to the status of a “white” brethren people (at least in their origins, if

us,” we should not forget “the possession that belongs to us [that is, India’s intellectual rather than her material wealth] and which we must administer in the best interests of all.” “We, too, after, all,” he concludes plaintively, “have a significant role to play in the picture of the world that the present is creating.” *Ibid.*, 406.

622. Williamson, *The Longing for Myth in Germany*, cited earlier.

623. See Slaje, “Was ist und welchem Zwecke dient die Indologie,” 311–31, especially 327, n. 17 (“then one would have to consider the fact that it is once again Europe itself that, in the broken perception of its Indian reflection, is now struggling with something that is not essentially alien [to it], but with something that is originally its own.”), 330 (“Someone who studies Indology gains something whose lack is today loudly lamented on all sides: an education in the sense of a formation of mind and personality. A strict training in grammatical and philological categories of reflection, a guide to logically correct thought in complex argumentative contexts in the interpretation of texts, training of the faculty of conceptual abstraction, and mental flexibility. All this against the challenging background of having to free himself from the inherited intellectual categories of an European through a methodically accompanied self-reflection in order to penetrate into the strange intellectual worlds of (ancient) Indian heads, to reconstruct their mental world, to analyze it and, finally, to translate it conceptually into the horizon of intelligibility of Europe.”), and 330–31 (“If we for once look away from the side-effect of a sharpening of Indian consciousness for its significant role for [world] civilization in the spiritual and cultural development of humanity, what is at stake in the final analysis is the location of our own European cultural-sphere.”) Oldenberg’s narrative of German superiority (see later) has given way to a narrative of European superiority, but for all intents and purposes the justification for Indology has remained the same.

624. Among those to have studied the relationship of Jews and Brahmins within German discourse is Dorothy L. Figueira; see her *Aryans, Jews, Brahmins*, cited earlier. Figueira focuses on how Western scholars from Voltaire onwards used Indian texts to displace the Jews, “the great plagiarizers of history” (*ibid.*, 17), from their central place in

not throughout their history), Indians would confer upon Germans the title they so desperately longed for: members of the most ancient cultural tradition of the world, exceeding Greek-Latinate culture in its antiquity.⁶²⁵

8. Insistence on institutional autonomy. In spite of all the problems in their reading of the Mahābhārata and the Bhagavadgītā, German Indologists remained hostile to any form of collaboration right until the end. This hostility extended not only to the thought of including Indian scholarship or Indian ideas, but also to the thought of incorporating literary, philosophical, or hermeneutic approaches *taken from German intellectual life*. Indeed, throughout its history we see that the paradigmatic struggle for German Indology was not against the Indians (how many Brahmins after all were competing with the Indologists for chairs at German universities?) but against other German disciplines. The heightened rhetoric about critical consciousness, about scientificity, about rigor, about a body of independent work, about uniquely Indological methods was aimed—in the final analysis—not at Indians scholars but at German university administrators. It was grist for public consumption, produced by a discipline that always had a tenuous claim to legitimacy within the Continental intellectual tradition.
9. Insistence on German superiority. Even three-quarters of a century after the world had broken with narratives of Āryan superiority, German scholars continued to affirm the narrative of German superiority. Scholars as problematic as Holtzmann, Garbe, Otto, and Hauer were reintegrated into a narrative of “critical” scholarship, while the abiding geniuses of the Indian tradition (Śaṅkara, Rāmanuja, Madhvā, and so on) were castigated as “uncritical” for “establish[ing] [their] own hermeneutics on the basis of the religious or philosophical tradition [they] adher[e] to.”⁶²⁶ In a similar vein, scholars continued to try to revive the Āryan Kṣatriya myth, while decrying Indian philosophical interpretations of the text as being motivated in Brahmanic ideology.⁶²⁷ The problem thus cannot be reduced to that of a few problematic figures (Hauer, Frauwallner, Waldschmidt, et al.⁶²⁸) within an otherwise unproblematic tradition. Rather, prejudice against Indian tradition is so deeply ingrained within Indology that we see that it constitutes its most

the Creation drama. However, Figueira does not close the circle to demonstrate how, from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, Brahmins were themselves cast in the role of rabbis who had corrupted the original revelation. If it is true that German researches into ancient Indian texts played a formative role in the growth of anti-Semitism, it is equally true that those researches, from their very inception, were already shaped by German anti-Semitism.

625. For the role played by the rivalry with France in the development of Indology in Germany, see McGetchin, *Indology, Indomania, and Orientalism*, 18, 21, 55, and 69–72.

626. The quotation is from Malinar, *The Bhagavadgītā*, 17, cited earlier.

627. See Georg von Simson's *Das Mahābhārata: Die Große Erzählung von den Bhāratas* (the relevant passages are all cited earlier).

628. Ernst Waldschmidt, former chair of Indology in Göttingen, was a Nazi, member of the Reichsbund der Deutschen Beamten as early as 1934 (the organization was only founded in 1933), the NSDAP (Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei) in 1937, and the NSDDB (Nationalsozialistischer Deutscher Dozentenbund) in 1938. See Anikó Szabó, *Vertreibung, Rückkehr, Wiedergutmachung: Göttinger Hochschullehrer im Schatten des Nationalsozialismus* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2000), 132, n. 223. (None of these facts are

basic methodological principle. When Stietencron, Malinar, and Hanneder seek to clarify the distinction between German scholarship and Indian scholarship in terms of the greater self-consciousness of the German scholars, they are not giving expression to a personal opinion, but rather articulating the basic assumption of all Indological scholarship. The discipline as a whole, and not just a few individuals, is tainted.⁶²⁹

Herling's effort to understand the German encounter with the *Gītā* in terms of a narrative of progress thus does not work. Though laudable in intent, it is too uncritical of the work of the Indologists. Herling is far too trusting as regards the narrative of an unscientific, Romantic Indology (in the work of Herder, Schlegel, and Humboldt) being replaced by a scientific, philologically founded Indology.⁶³⁰ As this is precisely the impression the Indologists wish to convey, it makes sense to suspend faith for a moment to ask whether this narrative is an accurate description of the actual state of affairs. Because what was at stake in this scholarship was never the text itself (i.e., a work that had something to say), the thesis of a progressive unfolding of hermeneutic consciousness is an incorrect way to approach the Indologists' work. The correct analogy for Indology in Herling's inquiry is not the process of reception of a text, but the institutionalization of other pseudoscientific fields of inquiry in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Germany, such as the various attempts to classify racial phenotypes in the disciplines of *Rassenkunde* or *Rassentheorie* (race science or racial theory) or to draw consequences for society from this knowledge in the discipline of *Rassenhygiene* (racial hygiene).⁶³¹ Yet, because Herling's suggestion is well intended, we should ask under what conditions it might be true. We offer three suggestions.

mentioned on the webpage of the Ernst-Waldschmidt-Stiftung or in the obituary published in the *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* or on the homepage of the University of Göttingen. They are also not mentioned on the webpage of the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz, which lists the Ernst-Waldschmidt-Stiftung as one of its benefactors and partners.)

629. See preceding note; the fact that important details have been elided from these official accounts is further evidence that there is a problem with Indology as a whole and not just a few representatives.

630. See Herling, "Either a Hermeneutical Consciousness or a Critical Consciousness," 70 ("Classicist philological sensibilities and Romantic enthusiasm, which persisted beyond Schlegel's own disillusionment, were in fact crucial elements in the construction of a viable hermeneutical location for the new discipline of Indology.") and see also *ibid.* for the claim that Schlegel's *Bhagavadgītā* edition of 1823 "reveals that a new interpretive structure is at work in the examination of Indian sources: that of philological science." Also see the claim on p. 70 that "philological prejudices, which led to many fruitful avenues of reception, tempered the excesses of bygone enthusiasms and led ultimately to a measured account that is noteworthy even to this day" and on p. 74 that "some room [must be] made for the possibility of refinements in understanding and logos is the name for the application of technique and method to the project of cross-cultural understanding (here the application of philological, exegetical tools to a text like the *Gītā* is an example."

631. In addition to the "archaeology" of Indology that comprises this book, a sociology of the field remains a future task. That it cannot be undertaken in the present book is clear enough. Similarly wide researches must determine how the discipline was set up,

Table 3.1 A COMPARISON OF GERMAN GĪTĀ RECONSTRUCTIONS^A

		Richard									
		Adolf	Garbe	Hermann	Hermann			Rudolf	Jakob Wilhelm		
Name (year of reconstruction)		Holtzman Jr. (1893)	(1905; additional changes in 1914)	Jacobi (1918)	Oldenberg (1919)			Otto (1934)	Hauer (1937)	Georg von Simson (1969)	
Thesis →		Only pantheistic elements are original	Only theistic elements are original	Only epic elements are original	Key to the poem in 2.39; everything thereafter belongs to the “didactic poem”	Only elements relating to Arjuna’s “situation” are original; Gītā the classic instance of the numinous experience of the <i>mysterium tremendum</i>		Gītā a “metaphysics of battle and action”		Gītā a “secondary interpolation” following the 1sta first interp. olation from 6.16.21–6.20.22 and 6.42.1	
1 (47)		1–47? ^b	1–19	1–19	1–47	1–47		1–47	1–47? ^c	28–33, 38–42, 45 Removed	
2 (72)		1–72? (1–38, heroic Gītā; thereafter addition of Yoga)	17, 72	17, 72	1–10 ^d (28–30 inserted. after 15)	38–72		38–72	39–72	7, 11–21, 23–28, 30, 31–34, 37–38, 39–41, 47–49, 50, 55–57, 60–65, 70 Removed Removed	

(Continued)

Table 3.1 (Continued)

Name (year of reconstruction)	Adolf Holtzman Jr. (1893)	Richard Garbe (1905; additional changes in 1914)		Hermann Jacobi (1918)	Hermann Oldenberg (1919)	Rudolf Otto (1934)	Jakob Wilhelm Hauer (1937)	Georg von Simson (1969)
		9-18, 23	9-18, 23					
3 (43)	1-43?	9-18, 23	9-18, 23	Removed	Secondary Gita	Removed	Removed 4-8, 9-15, 16, 17-18, 19, 20-21, 22-25, 26, 27-28, 30-31, 33, 34-35, 36-41, 42-43	Removed
4 (42)	3-42	24, 31-32, 34-35	24, 31-32, 34-35	Removed	Secondary Gita	Removed	Removed 6-8, 16-17, 18-21, 23-24	Removed
5 (29)	Removed	6-7, 10, 16-22, 24-26	6-7, 10, 16-22, 24-26	Removed	Secondary Gita	Removed	Removed 10	Removed
6 (47)	Removed	27-32	27-32	Removed	Secondary Gita	Removed	Removed 1, 5-6, 10-15, 17-18, 19-22	Removed

7 (30)	Removed	7-11, 14-15, 19, 25-26, 29-30	7-11, 14-15, 19, 25-26, 29-30	Removed	Secondary Gita	Removed	Removed	6-11	Removed
8 (28)	Removed	1-4, 20-28	1-4, 20-28	Removed	Secondary Gita	Removed	Removed	7, 9-10, 18-22	Removed
9 (34)	Removed	1-6, 16-19, 1-6, 29	1-6, 16-19, 1-6, 29	Removed	Secondary Gita	Removed	Removed	1-3, 4-6, 7-10	Removed
10 (42)	Removed	12-42	12-42	Removed	Secondary Gita	9-42	Removed	12-13, 19-20, 38-41	Removed
11 (55)	Removed	7, 13, 15-16, 18-19, 37-40	7, 13, 15-16, 18-19, 37-40	Removed	Secondary Gita	7, 13, 15-16, 18-19, 37-40, 52-55	1-55 Mincho	15-19, 28-30, 32-33	Removed
12 (20)	Removed	1-20	1-20	Removed	Secondary Gita	Removed	Removed	2, 6-8	Removed
13 (34)	Removed	2, 4, 12-18, 27-28, 30-33	2, 4, 12-18, 27-28, 30-33	Removed	Secondary Gita	Removed	Removed	29	Removed
14 (27)	Removed	26-27	1-27	Removed	Removed	Removed	Removed	3-8, 19	Removed
15 (20)	Removed	12-15	1-20	Removed	Removed	Removed	Removed	—	Removed

(Continued)

First, no rhetoric against “Indians.” If the interest in Indian texts is genuine, there will be no rhetoric against Indian tradition. When reading Shakespeare, we do not have to declare how stupid the English are. Nor do we have to begin by setting aside Milton, Dryden, Lawrence, and Auden as “uncritical,” because—allegedly—being English, they cannot be trusted to arrive at an objective evaluation of his work. When translated into a European context, we immediately see the offensiveness of denying individuals the ability to form independent judgments on the basis of national origin. Why should the same not hold for Indian tradition?

Second, no rhetoric about the superiority of the Germans. If the aim is to understand the text rather than to uphold a hegemony, there will also be no rhetoric about the superiority of German scholarship. All such statements should be struck out as irrelevant at best and prejudicial at worst. There is no Indo-Germanic connection, in spite of the volumes of work written on the topic.⁶³² German scholars have to begin, like the rest of us, with the elementary conditions of understanding. They do not have privileged access to Indian thought, deriving either from their superior empathy or sensitivity (this was the Romantic illusion) or from their superior scientificity (the philological illusion).

Third, no rhetoric about the progress of reason. If the aim is not just to master the text but also to learn something, and to learn something new and different, about oneself, then there will also be no rhetoric about the necessary progress of reason. This narrative, culminating always in the European present, is itself a remnant of Christian theology. It is the unquestioned assumption not only of Indology but also of all modern philology. But as we have seen, there is no greater stumbling block to an understanding of the ancients in their alterity than the assumption that we have nothing to learn from them, but many things (critical self-consciousness, emancipation of the mind from dogma, methodological inquiry, comparative research, and so on) to teach them.

German scholarship of the Mahābhārata and Bhagavadgītā can thus be framed as essentially a problem of reception. The problem arose because, irrespective of what the Indian texts or their commentaries were saying, German scholars were only able to understand them as dogmatic, theological and/or sectarian works. They were unable to see that the commentators offered superb glosses on the source texts, preserving the meaning contained in them, to be sure, but also offering refinements and restatements as appropriate to their historical context. In contrast, they saw themselves as critical, enlightened, and as having overcome all form of confessional commitment. Thus, in analyzing this problem of reception, the first question must be: whence this conviction of having overcome theology in the Enlightenment? This question will lead us to the next constellation of tasks.

who benefited from it, what ends it served, and so on. We have chosen to neglect this institutional aspect of Indology in order to be able to tell the history of its method with greater clarity.

632. See the various works by Wilfried Nölle, Ludwig Alsdorf, Sisir Kumar Das, and Walter Leifer, all cited in the bibliography. McGetchin, *Indology, Indomania, and Orientalism*, chapter 7 contains a useful summary of these works. And see Robert Cowan's *The Indo-German Identification: Reconciling South Asian Origins and European Destinies, 1765–1885* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2010) for a discussion of the views of some earlier authors regarding a privileged Indo-Germanic connection.

CHAPTER 4



The Search for a Universal Method

The Protestant pastor is the grandfather of German philosophy, Protestantism its *peccatum originale*... One need only utter the words “Tübingen School” to get an understanding of what German philosophy is at bottom—a very artful form of theology...

Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*

INTRODUCTION

The preceding look at the critical method as applied in German Mahābhārata and Bhagavadgītā scholarship brought to light a number of problems. Although German scholars claimed to take a scientific approach to the epic, their interpretations were at best tangential and at worst irrelevant to the text at hand. No German interpreter in a period extending one hundred years (i.e., if we take Lassen’s 1837 article on the Mahābhārata as the starting point and Hauer’s 1937 book on the Bhagavadgītā as the end point) had succeeded in presenting a coherent, philosophically illuminating interpretation of the Mahābhārata. The histories they presented of the epic existed nowhere else outside their own minds. It is a commonplace to assert that every attempt at understanding is beset by difficulties, especially so when it involves two cultures. But in the case of German interpretations of Indian texts, the problem is not simply one of the inevitable misinterpretations that beset every hermeneutic endeavor.¹ Rather, the critical method itself entailed a number of problematic prejudices (e.g., the untenability of the exegetic tradition, historical consciousness as a stage that supersedes and replaces Indian consciousness, and the search for primordial doctrines or Ur-texts).

In light of the problems with the critical method that appeared in the earlier parts of this book, this chapter seeks to understand the reasons why the Indologists themselves could not see these problems. It became clear that the historical-critical

1. Herling argues that such a process is at work at least in the Gītās of the philosophers Herder, Schlegel, von Humboldt, and Hegel. But whether such a process is at work in the later German Gītās of the Indologists is doubtful: here, the method has become self-evident and mechanical, and the goal is no longer understanding but (pseudo)accuracy.

method was not a method among others, but itself entailed a hidden metaphysics. Yet, instead of undertaking a historical and critical reflection on this method, German Indologists insisted on its universal and nondogmatic character. What historical processes underlie this conviction? In this chapter, we trace the roots of the critical method from its historical origins in the work of the biblical critics J. S. Semler and F. C. Bauer to its adoption in the work of Rudolf von Roth, Indologist and founder of the study of history of religions. This chapter is divided into three sections: first, we look at the scientization of Protestant theology in the critical method, then at the secularization of Protestant theology in the study of the history of religions, and thereafter at the institutionalization of Protestant theology in Indology. The key themes we shall focus on are, in the first section, how the historical-critical method participates in a tradition of projecting a universal history, most characteristic of Christianity; in the second section, how the method makes use of a teleological narrative of history, where history moves from a state of immaturity (the Kantian *Unmündigkeit*) to an enlightened, free, and critical use of reason; and, in the third section, how this narrative was used to justify implantation of an alternative tradition of textual scholarship in place of the Indian commentarial tradition.

THE SCIENTIZATION OF PROTESTANT THEOLOGY IN THE CRITICAL METHOD

In the introduction, we already saw that the origins of the historical-critical method are theological. This is true not only in the sense that the method originated with the Neo-Protestant theologian and biblical critic J. S. Semler but also in the sense that Semler pursued a specific theological agenda. His aim was the delegitimization of Jewish (Old Testament) scripture. Gerdmar, in his book, refers to Semler's project as being the dejudification of (New Testament) scripture.² The historical-critical method thus, from its very inception, was a method designed for specific theological agendas. These agendas were both exclusivist (because the method insisted on separating out the religious kernel of Christianity from its historical context) and fundamentalist (because it advocated a return to the text in the quest for this true salvific core). Nonetheless, we would miss out on the essence of this method if we were to see it as merely prosecuting theological ends. What is unique about the historical-critical method is not so much its theological antecedents as the way it gave renewed legitimacy to these ends through a scientization (*Verwissenschaftlichung*) of theological discourse. Understanding this process of scientization that German academic theology underwent in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries is key to understanding how a discipline could emerge by the mid-nineteenth century that, although radically theological in its origins and aims, could claim to be a universal, secular, and rational science of the study of Indian texts.

Commenting on the new *Wissenschaftsideologie* of eighteenth-century Germany, Howard notes that *Wissenschaft* lost its "grand, idealist associations" over time "and took

2. See Gerdmar, *Roots of Theological Anti-Semitism*, 47, 461, 553, 559, 576, 587.

on a more limited definition.” This definition entailed, in particular, the idea of “empirical rigour, and the putative ideological neutrality of the scholar.” However, even as the new scientific consciousness turned away from the old ideals of university education (the *sacra facultas*), one finds the old theological rivalry invading this new consciousness. “The idea of neutrality—or *Voraussetzungslosigkeit* (literally, presuppositionlessness)—as a characteristic of *Wissenschaft* becomes especially pronounced toward the end of the nineteenth century; it was often trumpeted by secular and progressive Protestant scholars to criticize those, notably Roman Catholics, believed to be incapable of producing true science because of their adherence to confessional goals.”³

Just as the notion of science could be repurposed in service of a Protestant, German identity, so also theology. Although bitterly attacked by its detractors,⁴ German academic theology did not wither away. In fact, one of the remarkable academic stories of the nineteenth century is how a discipline, whose survival at the university had been seriously in doubt a century before, reasserted itself by placing itself in the service of the new Prussian state. With names such as Friedrich Schleiermacher, F. C. Bauer, and later Ernst Troeltsch and Adolf von Harnack, and departments at Göttingen, Halle, and Berlin, German academic theology underwent a renaissance, drawing students from far beyond Germany’s borders. The impact German scholarship made on these foreign students is best recorded in a statement by an American theologian commenting on his impressions of German academic theology: “There we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight.”⁵

To be sure, theology was not immune to intellectual and political currents, especially the new scientific and historical consciousness, sweeping through Germany at the time. But what is remarkable is that, rather than going under in the face of these currents, it was able to absorb them within itself. In fact, in a reverse process, it was able to insert its concerns into the new scientific and historical outlook. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the expectations now placed on science. Howard notes that “many leading theological voices did not construe *Wissenschaft*—whether in its idealist or its positivist guise—as a necessary threat to theological verities.”⁶ “In fact, liberal Protestant theologians often interpreted the critical rigours of modern enquiry as the logical, historical fruit of the Reformation, which challenged the dogmatic rigidities of Catholicism. To reject *Wissenschaft* therefore was tantamount to vitiating the purest and most progressive form of human religious consciousness: modern Protestantism. Turning away from the spirit of *Wissenschaft*, as one theologian put it, amounted to ‘a defection from the essence of Protestantism.’”⁷

3. Howard, *Protestant Theology*, 29.

4. For criticisms, see Howard, *Protestant Theology*, especially the chapter “*Sacra Facultas* and German Modernity.”

5. For the source, see Howard, *Religion and the Rise of Historicism*, 23. The line is from Numbers 13:33.

6. Howard, *Protestant Theology*, 33–34.

7. *Ibid.*, 34, the reference is to Adolf Hilgenfeld, “Die wissenschaftliche Theologie und ihre gegenwärtige Aufgabe. Vorwort des Herausgebers,” *Zeitschrift für wissenschaftliche Theologie* 1 (1858): 2.

The historian of science, John Hedley Brooke, also emphasizes the role of Protestant theology in the birth of this new ideology of science:

A Protestant emphasis on improving the world, under the aegis of providence, could confer dignity on scientific activity that promised both glory to God and the relief of human suffering. Conceptions of a better world over which Christ would reign for a thousand years (the millennium) were later secularized to yield visions of a purely earthly utopia, in which a perfect human society might be possible in the absence of coercive measures. Notwithstanding the unbridled optimism of many such visions, it cannot be denied that one source of the modern idea of progress was the millenary theology of Protestant reformers anxious to transform the world in readiness for Christ's second coming.⁸

Just as Protestantism came to identify itself with the new scientific consciousness, endowing it with a quasi-religious aspect,⁹ it was also instrumental in the rise of historicism. Howard recounts the following vignette about the historian Jacob Burckhardt that illustrates how historicism developed from a crisis of faith in nineteenth-century German Protestantism:

During his years as a theology student at the University of Basel (1837–1839), Burckhardt came into contact with de Wette's radical historical criticism and innovative, non-orthodox theology. Burckhardt, son of Basel's highest ranking Protestant pastor, experienced a shattering crisis of faith as a result. He vowed to be an "honest heretic" (*ehrlicher Ketzer*)—presumably to avoid being a dishonest one—and gave up theology in favor of historical studies. In 1839, he left his hometown for Berlin, where he studied history under some of the greatest names of nineteenth-century German historical scholarship: Leopold von Ranke, J. G. Droysen, Jakob Grimm, and Franz Kugler.¹⁰

Nor was Burckhardt's case an isolated incident. As Howard further notes, "Many eighteenth- and nineteenth-century scholars began in theology. Fifty-six of the ninety-three holders of historical chairs in Germany before 1800 had received theological training. The major nineteenth-century historians—Ranke, Droysen, and Theodor Mommsen, like Burckhardt—all came from pastors' homes and (except for Mommsen) had studied theology before experiencing difficulties and switching over to history."¹¹ Historicism itself emerges "from long-standing dilemmas internal to theology and biblical exegesis...the cognitive conditions necessary for the emergence of crisis historicism" are traceable to "hermeneutical and epistemological

8. John Hedley Brooke, *Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 23–24.

9. "Science as religion" is a central theme of German writers such as Schelling and Fichte. Its influence can be seen even in Max Weber's "Wissenschaft als Beruf." It will continue even into the writings of late Indologists, albeit somewhat toned down.

10. Howard, *Religion and the Rise of Historicism*, 5.

11. *Ibid.*, 5.

reorientations, internal to Protestant theology, that were rooted in the early modern period and gained prominence during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—before one can properly speak of the disciplinary autonomy of history.” Howard concludes, “In other words, the category ‘history’ was experienced as a theological and biblical-exegetical problem long before the popularization of the nineteenth century’s ‘historical method.’”¹²

Cassirer’s judgment of the Enlightenment as a whole is that of a stage within Germany’s religious development. “Among thinkers of the German Enlightenment,” he writes, “the fundamental objective is not the dissolution of religion but its ‘transcendental’ justification and foundation.”¹³ The question for us thus becomes, as Howard argues: “Might then a secular historical outlook, born in the wake of the German Enlightenment, retain traces, revealing elisions, hereditary marks that betray significant continuities between premodern-theological and modern-historical ways of thinking? Karl Löwith has pointed out that even outspoken critics of Christianity in the nineteenth century were for the most part theologically educated Protestants.”¹⁴

Against this background, we can now understand how the application of the historical-critical method to Indian texts could embody an ideology. The dialectical structure of the historical-critical method, originally developed to accommodate the contrast between a pagan or Jewish and a Christian outlook, could now, when applied to Indian texts, provide further confirmation of the validity of the method. As we saw earlier, the historical-critical cannot get underway unless one first posits a difference in the text. It is in this sense that the method is critical at all (Greek *krinein*, to discriminate, to separate). Once this difference is posited, the method can then be used to separate out the ideologies or elements posited. In Semler’s case, the elements had been the Jewish and historical-mythic aspects of the text and the true Christian revelation. But what is more relevant for our inquiry is the way Semler developed this contrast in terms of the distinction between particular and universal history.

The Christian religion is for all people, the Jewish is only *particular*...; therefore it had to be annulled (*aufgehoben*), to give space to the Christian universal (*allgemein*) religion, which has completely different books as its sources and evidence and promises an entirely new covenant and a more perfected order of religion to all men.¹⁵

Semler argued that the particular nature of Judaism meant that it could never fulfill the task of bringing about man’s perfection. Thus, although certain elements in its books have moral value and certain individuals (e.g., Abraham) had a true intuition

12. Ibid., 14.

13. Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, ed. James P. Pettegrove, trans. Fritz Koelin (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1951), 136.

14. Howard, *Religion and the Rise of Historicism*, 3.

15. Cited and translated in Gerdmar, *Roots of Theological Anti-Semitism*, 40–41; the quotation is from Leopold Zscharnack, *Lessing und Semler. Ein Beitrag zur Entstehungsgeschichte des Rationalismus und der kritischen Theologie* (Gießen: Töpelmann, 1905), 112–13. Zscharnack himself cites Semler’s *Canon*, vol. 1, 143, as the source, but we have been unable to find the passage in Semler.

of God and the moral law, as a whole the Jews are limited by (deficient) culture and intelligence.¹⁶ The task falls to Christianity, which, as the true universal reason, was not only the logical, historical culmination of the Jewish faith but also destined to bring about a true critical stance on the latter. This now leads to the problem of how to read Jewish scripture (critically). Writes Semler:

When we now on the other side consider that among other nations [Völkern] divine providence has enabled many more moral truths, a much greater culture of the capacities of a lively reason and so wisely has caused it to be so kindly, which now takes place much more among us, the ones called Christians, with regard to the education and instruction of certain individuals, then can we really affirm that we should really read all those parts of the Book of Moses, of Joshua, of Judges, etc. with a consistent and constant attitude and judgment all the time, one that encompasses an immediate god-worshipping focus, prayer, thanks, over and above the great value and advantage contained in doing so, that is, encompasses a constant worshipfulness both prior to and after [our reading]?¹⁷

This question is answered in the negative by Semler. Because these books are “partially provincial, partially family histories,” there is “nothing in them of immediate significance for other people (except the Jews) with respect to moral perfection in the use of reason and the will necessary for them at the present according to present circumstances.”¹⁸ Hence, the Christian has no obligation to read these works seriously. What holds for the average Christian holds even more so for the historical-critical scholar. As Semler clarifies at the end of the section, this is what is meant by “a *free* investigation of the so-called *canon* [*freie Untersuchung des sogenannten Canons*] of the Jews and Christians.”¹⁹ The investigation is “free” because it is not bound by Jewish views of the canon.

16. Semler argues that “The use [or the practice] of so-called natural truths has been made easier and aided in some men, which has not as yet occurred in others. The former are thus truly further [along the path], as regards the moral evaluation of these truths as compared to the common heap [der gemeine Haufen] of Jews and of the first Christians; and they can thus do without certain preparations and instructions that are very necessary and useful for the common heap.” Semler, *Abhandlung vom freien Canon*, vol. 1, 22. Although Semler’s main intent is to demonstrate that certain (inspired) individuals possess ideas of morality even without having read (or needing to read) the Old Testament, he also suggests that this faculty is divinely ordained (*ibid.*), implying a naturalization of this difference. He also makes it clear that Jews are not deficient with regard to just any race, but specifically vis-à-vis Christians, among whom “divine providence has truly enabled many more moral truths, a much greater culture of the capacities of a lively reason.” *Ibid.*, 50. Gerdmar is guarded on the question of the extent of Semler’s anti-Semitism (noting that it was far less pronounced than that of the English Deist, Thomas Morgan), but there is no doubt that Semler too resorts to the stereotype of the uncultured and unenlightened Jew to make certain points regarding the development of free, universal reason.

17. *Ibid.*, 50.

18. *Ibid.*, 51.

19. *Ibid.*, 52 (Semler’s emphasis).

F. C. Bauer largely followed the contours of Semler's program, except that he introduced an explicitly dialectical moment into the method. Christianity emerges from the two antipodes of paganism and Judaism. As thesis and antithesis, respectively, the two come together and undergo dissolution, yielding a higher, ethical religion: Christianity. This development is conceived of by Bauer as a spiritual development. It is the history of the spirit coming into its own: self-consciousness. Bauer argues that the Jews lacked a consciousness of the finitude of the *διαθήκη* (i.e., covenant or testament). This fact was the "limitation in their consciousness that, as long as they remained standing [on this level], made them Jews forever." Meanwhile, the "advance [Fortschritt] from Judaism to Christianity could only occur in that one became conscious that Judaism was a mere finite form."²⁰ This realization paves the way for Christianity as a purified—that is, spiritualized and inward-turned—Judaism.

Bauer's combination of Hegelian dialectic with Semlerian theology yields a notion of Christianity in which Christianity has become an idea. Christianity is nothing but the idea in history working itself out, proceeding always in the direction of greater self-consciousness and freedom.²¹ This notion was crucial to Bauer's concept of Christianity as an ethical religion. Whereas the "Christian faith is accomplished in the spontaneity of the ethical, through the free will power of man and his innate consciousness,"²² the Palestinian Jews "had to be lifted out of their narrowness into Alexandria, where purification occurred."²³ The realization of self-consciousness implies a corresponding turn inward: interiority.

Christianity, for Bauer, is thus less a religion with definite customs than a "spiritual power, the absolute Principle through which the self-consciousness of the Spirit is carried on, where spiritual is understood as inward in contrast to outward."²⁴ In contrast, pre-Christian or non-Christian faiths are characterized as outward-turned, lacking in self-consciousness, and subject to (Oriental) despotism. It is only through contact with Occidental cultures, that is, with the exposure to their free, self-conscious, and critical thinking, that the Jews can be lifted out of their religious and political morass. Whereas Semler had merely assigned Jews to a lower stage of

20. Bauer, *Paulus, der Apostel Jesu Christi*, 142.

21. Bauer speaks of how Paul, although able to penetrate "all the moments of subjective consciousness," nonetheless "focused principally on the objective course of development conditioned by the absolute idea of God; in that he saw major, historically-given oppositions [and] universal forms of religious development in heathenism, Judaism, and Christianity, he did not focus merely on individuals, but rather on the masses; out of the self-certitude of his Christian consciousness, all questions and riddles of the world became clear to him in a single glance, so that, ultimately, everything must be subordinated to the absolute idea of God, permeated by it and taken up into its unity." Bauer, *Paulus, der Apostel Jesu Christi*, 289. Although Bauer is speaking of Paul, it is clear that this account is simultaneously a statement of his own views on Christianity. Even though Christianity initially appears as a *moment* in the evolution of the idea, it is clear that the final state, the absolute idea, is attained with the self-reflexive recognition of Christianity made possible through historical consciousness.

22. Gerdmar, *Roots of Theological Anti-Semitism*, 113.

23. *Ibid.*, 119.

24. *Ibid.*, 112–13.

the (moral) evolutionary scale, Bauer rejected that they even have the capacity to be aware of this difference. It is only through contact with Christianity as the stage that has superseded them that they can even become aware of their deficits vis-à-vis the latter.

This application of the historical-critical method, however, not only entails the scientization of a view of history (one whose roots are essentially theological) but also leads to a theologization of the method itself. If all of history is moving toward ever greater self-consciousness, then the method by means of which one surveys or evaluates that movement itself becomes the pinnacle of consciousness attained at a given moment in time. This problem is at the heart of Gadamer's criticism of historicism: "In relying on its critical method, historical objectivism conceals the fact that historical consciousness is itself situated in the web of historical effects. By means of methodical critique it does away with the arbitrariness of 'relevant' appropriations of the past, but it preserves its good conscience by failing to recognize the presuppositions—certainly not arbitrary, but still fundamental—that govern its understanding. . . ." ²⁵ Thus, at the same time as the historical method legitimized a certain narrative of history, it also universalized that narrative, including itself within it. And since this narrative was essentially teleological, this meant that the historical method, implicitly and to the same extent as it universalized this narrative, also posited itself as the end of history.

In the introduction to the first edition of his book, Bauer addressed criticisms of Strauß's controversial *Das Leben Jesu* as follows: ²⁶ he argues that there is no conflict between the historical-critical approach and dogmatic faith in the primacy of Christianity because the Christian faith (unlike other religions) is cognizant of its history. Christianity does not just appear within history (as all other religions do), but insists on the historicity of Christ and of the Gospel (as also of Christ's second coming). The historical-critical method, by tracing the history of Christianity and raising it to the level of consciousness, was in fact doing no more than participating in the historical movement of Christianity. Bauer observes that "the criticism of evangelical history, since it immediately concerns the life of the founder of Christianity. . . will remain for long the most important object of critical efforts in our time." But this inquiry must "proximally" take the form of a "historical-critical investigation of the question. . . [of] how Christianity, which was so closely bound up with Judaism, tore itself free of the latter, and entered into the sphere of its world-historical significance," since it is precisely through this history (which Bauer conceives dialectically) that Christianity comes into its own. Bauer argues, "If what encounters us out of evangelical history as the epitome [Inbegriff] of the historical significance of the life of Christ" is "the consciousness of the idea of Christianity and of the principle of the same [i.e., of Christianity]," then the "true object of historical contemplation" must be "the practical realization of this idea." The "practical

25. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 300.

26. Strauß was Bauer's student; they were leading representatives of the Tübingen School.

realization of the idea of Christianity,” however, first comes about once “the idea, through the death and resurrection of Christ, has penetrated the reality of consciousness and come a vital force within the same [i.e., within consciousness]” and now “finds that the main obstacle to achieving its world-historical reality lies in the bounds of national Judaism.”²⁷ Bauer’s conclusion is succinct:

How these bounds were broken, how Christianity, instead of remaining a mere form of Judaism and ultimately merging into the latter again, transformed itself into an independent principle, in order to tear itself free of it [Judaism] and to oppose itself to it as a new form of religious consciousness and life, one essentially distinct from it and freed of every trace of the national particularity of Judaism—this is by far the most important point of the early history of Christianity.²⁸

Even if part of the reason for Bauer’s argument was tactical, there can be no doubt that in his mind there was a real consonance between historical consciousness and Christianity. In contrast to Judaism (which lacked the capacity for self-reflection), Christianity was from the beginning an open, critical, and self-conscious religion. The emergence of historical consciousness was a natural consequence of these traits of Christianity; indeed, it could only have emerged out of Christianity. Although he does not seem to have realized it himself, by making historical consciousness normative for realizing what was historically unique about Christianity, where this uniqueness lies precisely in the consciousness of its uniqueness, Bauer was tacitly placing historical consciousness at the forefront of Christianity. Historical consciousness explicitly realizes a possibility that is merely implicit in Christianity, the possibility of undertaking a self-reflexive turn toward oneself in an act of historical reflection. Like the latter, historical consciousness, too, claims to offer a universal narrative of history and, again like the latter, it posits itself as the end and meaning of this historical unfolding. Indeed, by also encompassing Christianity within itself as a stage in history (one need only think of the work of David Friedrich Strauß), it explicitly claimed to surpass the former.

Yet, even as the historical-critical method freed itself of its origins in Protestantism, it nonetheless bore unmistakable traces of these origins. First, as is especially evident in the work of the nineteenth-century critics, the universality of the historical method is now opposed to the particularity of other approaches. In the wake of this shift, all other approaches—allegorical, typological, moral or tropological, and analogical—now appear as partial approximations of the truth that is provided by the historical-critical method, just as all other religions are partial approximations of the truth that manifests in and as Christianity. Second, the historical method entails a radical relativization and delegitimization of alternative sources of scriptural authority: alternative, that is, to the Protestant hermeneutic tradition (Semler) or its modern-day descendant historical consciousness (Bauer). In the case of Indology,

27. F. C. Bauer, *Paulus, der Apostel Jesu Christi: Sein Leben und Wirken, seine Briefe und seine Lehre. Ein Beitrag zur kritischen Geschichte des Urchristenthums* (Stuttgart: Becher & Müller, 1845), 3.

28. *Ibid.*

this takes the form of an exaggerated affect against all forms of traditional learning (see next section). One consequence of these historical developments is the way the weight of providing an absolute, that is to say, theological, interpretation of history is displaced into the method itself. It is no longer philosophy or religion (whether Christianity or Judaism or any other) that is called on to provide such an interpretation, but the scholar himself who, via the methodical application of his technique, is supposed to be capable of endowing history with meaning.

This overview of the scientization of theology that is inherent in the historical-critical method has been necessary because an insight into the theological expectations associated with the method allows us to understand its absolute authority in contemporary scholarship. We are no longer required to critique this method, to ask whence comes its enormous privilege or its enormous power of seduction over us. Indeed, we no longer ask how a method that arose in Europe at a specific moment in time, within a specific intellectual context, and geared to solving a specific problem (preserving a salvific core of religion in the face of the radical Enlightenment), could come to be seen as the method of critical scholarship tout court. The scholars who advocate this method for critical Indological scholarship no longer ask how the same method can be applied—and applied with similar indifference—to Hebrew and Arabic scripture, to Buddhist texts, or to Hindu texts.²⁹ They merely assume that the conditions for a universal reflection on all these cultures were first generated in Europe and, in a knee-jerk reflex, oppose the universality of the critical method to the particularity of these traditions. Yet, once one asks how this supposedly universal method relates to its own history—that is, once one asks what the specific historical conditions are that produced this universal historical consciousness—one sees that this method can only constitute itself on the basis of a concealment. As has become evident since the much-discussed “crisis of historicism,” the universality of historical consciousness can be bought only at the price of making an exception for just this consciousness, and that means that it cannot in fact be the absolute, universal self-consciousness it claims to be. Thus, along with Gadamer, we shall not follow this method in its “splendid self-forgetfulness”³⁰ but will instead trace how the

29. As we saw, a method can be so applied because it is, in a real sense, indifferent to the contents of these traditions. Having reduced them to identical moments, the method is interested only in the reconstruction of their historical sequence. Thus, not only can the same method be applied with equal indifference to a Buddhist text and a Hindu text, but it makes no difference *who* applies it. It is purely mechanical; a Japanese scholar can apply it just as well as a German. One requires neither sympathy for the tradition nor a long acquaintance nor intellectual maturity nor ethical qualifications to be able to practice the historical-critical method. But this indifference is not the same as true universality. It differs from the universality of a plural tradition, which possesses the conceptual resources to accommodate differing viewpoints and to engage in a dialogue with other traditions. The historical-critical method only appears to be universal, inasmuch as it strips traditions of their unique features and thus reduces them to the same. All traditions everywhere now become data for this rootless method.

30. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 453. Gadamer uses the expression of the Greek understanding of being as *nous*, which is divine, but it is also true of his view of historical consciousness.

application of this method to Indian texts responds to specific theological concerns, ones originating in debates with Catholic theology in the sixteenth century.

THE SECULARIZATION OF PROTESTANT THEOLOGY IN THE STUDY OF THE HISTORY OF RELIGIONS

Here is where an engagement with the problematic legacy of Protestant theology for German Indology must begin. In the preceding chapters, we saw that the work of Indologists from Holtzmann to Hauer was crucially informed by considerations of a religious nature. Whether seeking a primordial nature religion among the “Āryans” (Holtzmann) or critiquing the degeneracy of “Brahmanism” (Garbe, Jacobi, Oldenberg) or searching for clues to Germany’s future spiritual mission (Hauer and also Springmann, although we did not consider him), religion in one form or another was always at the center of German Indology’s concerns. Even when Indologists pretended to be interested in a secular study of religions or a history of religions, theological concerns were never absent. From Holtzmann to Hauer, contemporary scholars such as Heinrich von Stietencron have inherited the central function of Indology as commentary, critique and censure of Indian religions.

But to understand this focus on religion, we must go further back to the first beginnings of the disciplines of Indology and history of religions. We focus here on the central figure in this process, the Tübingen theologian, Orientalist, Veda researcher, and scholar of religion, Rudolf von Roth.

Roth belonged to the first generation of Indologists in Germany and, along with Albrecht Weber and Otto von Böhtlingk, was considered part of the “triumvirate” of German Indologists.³¹ Born in 1821, Roth studied theology toward the priesthood but later developed an interest in Oriental languages (he is supposed to have known Hebrew, Arabic, ancient Persian, and Avestan) and in the world’s religions. After completing a dissertation in Semitic studies under the celebrated Protestant theologian Heinrich Ewald, Roth went to Paris and London to study Sanskrit. Ewald was the primary influence behind Roth’s decision to offer lectures on the universal history of religions (*Allgemeine Religionsgeschichte*) on his return to Tübingen in 1849.

Although Roth had studied theology, his work was anything but dogmatic. For example, he rejected the historical understanding of religion that is characteristic of Bauer’s work. Whereas Bauer, as we have seen, arranged religions on a continuum depending on the extent to which they approximated the ideal religion (i.e., Christianity), Roth rejected Bauer’s historical scheme (as well as the implicit teleology underlying it). In its place, he advocated studying religions from a geographic and ethnographic perspective. As Junginger notes, “This requires us to assume the existence of *natural* boundaries between religions. Non-Christian religions are now no longer interpreted in their relationship to Christianity, but treated as autonomous units, ones that are culturally, historically, politically, geographically, linguistically, etc., distinct

31. For the expression, see *Rudolf von Roth, 1821–1895: Die Weite Welt nach Tübingen geholt* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1996), 43.

from each other." In his lectures on the history of religions at Tübingen, Roth also clarified that the study of the history of religions is concerned not with religion, but with religions in plural. "Without stating it explicitly, he acknowledged Christianity was one religion among many."³²

Roth's approach brought him into conflict with theology because he was implicitly rejecting Christianity's claim to being the sole true salvific religion, and in point of fact, there is evidence that he was not as closely bound to his faith as his colleagues.³³ Roth had initially wanted to be a priest (and even completed the necessary qualifying exams for the priesthood in 1842). But under the influence of his teacher, Heinrich Ewald, a proponent of historical thinking, he developed an interest in historical research to the extent of placing history in opposition to Christianity. Against the Reverend J. M. Mitchell,³⁴ who had criticized his book on the Vedas³⁵ for taking a "purely literary point of view," Roth pointed out that "history has . . . under all circumstances an indestructible right of its own, which may be set aside in deference to none other whatever." Making it clear that this statement was directed against the claims of Christian morality, he continued: "Historically established facts maintain their truth and values, even though they seem to be at variance with the narrowed Christian apprehension of history." Of course, ultimately, there was no conflict between Christianity and a historical perspective because "a correctly understood Christianity" would be "abundantly strong enough to allow historical truth to maintain itself without and within its limits, and even to make it subservient to its purposes."³⁶ The remainder of the article is dedicated to defending, against Mitchell, the intelligence and morality of the Indians, adducing numerous examples from the Vedas of the consonance between Indian and Christian notions of divinity.

Roth's inquiring mind and his efforts at founding the study of religions on the basis of philology and linguistics were instrumental in the establishment of the history of religions as an independent discipline at Tübingen and beyond. In a sense, he led the study of religion out of its theological confines and can rightly be considered the father of secular and historical religious studies in Germany.³⁷ And yet, when one

32. Junginger, *Von der philologischen zur völkischen Religionswissenschaft*, 27.

33. See Garbe's biography "Roth, Rudolf," in *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, vol. 53 (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1907), 553: "freisinnig"; and "Roth, Rudolf" in *Beiträge zur Kunde der indogermanischen Sprachen*, vol. 22, ed. Adalbert Bezzenberger (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1897), 146: "entschiedenen Freigeist."

34. Reverend J. M. Mitchell, "Notice of Dr. Roth's Investigations of the Veda [A review of *Zur Litteratur und Geschichte des Veda*, by Rudolf Roth]," *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 11 (July 1847): 404–10. Mitchell's other contributions to Indology are discussed in the *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Centenary Memorial Volume (1905).

35. Rudolf Roth, *Zur Litteratur und Geschichte des Veda* (Stuttgart: Liesching, 1845).

36. Rudolf Roth, "On the Morality of the Veda," trans. William D. Whitney, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 3 (1853): 334.

37. Hubert Cancik discusses the development of religious studies at Tübingen from the historical-critical method of Bauer all the way to the work of the Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch in his "Von Ferdinand Bauer zu Ernst Bloch: religionswissenschaftliche Arbeit an der Universität Tübingen seit der Spätaufklärung," *Studi e Materiali di Storia delle Religioni* 62 (1996): 75–96.

looks more closely at his work, one finds that for all its emancipatory potential, it too is not free of the religious prejudices of his age.

What were these prejudices? In the main, we can divide them into three: first, the assumption that every group of peoples has a “religion” on analogy with Christianity; second, a narrative of historical decline; and third, the assumption that the study of religions can be founded only on the study of the documents of the past. Because all three prejudices impact the study of Indian textual traditions, we look at them in detail here.

1. The Search for Universal Religions

The preserved transcripts of Roth’s lectures on history of religions allow us to reconstruct in detail his views regarding the universality of the phenomenon of religion. Roth divided his presentation into four main sections: Asia, Europe, America, and Polynesia.³⁸ The first section was further divided into three subsections: the religion of the “Āryan races” (India and Iran), the religion of the Semitic peoples (Arabs, Babylonians, Phoenicians, Egyptians), and of the people of north and east Asia (China, Japan, and other Asian peoples). The second main section was devoted to the European religions of the Greeks, Romans, Celts, Germans, Scandinavians, Slavs, and Finns, and the third and the fourth sections covered the religions of the American peoples and of the South Sea peoples.

How did Roth conceive these different religions? First, he saw religion as a tendency in all peoples. “Religion,” he clarified, “is the immediate expression of the religious sentiment of a people.”³⁹ As the expression of an innate tendency, the religious feeling is capable of development. For Roth, the study of the history of religions was thus the study of “the history of the human spirit, as it develops in the contemplation of nature, of the essence of divinity and of humanity.”⁴⁰ This historical perspective was independent of theological questions, for it merely sought to describe the independent manifestations of this impulse. Roth argued that “the philosophy of religions [Religionsphilosophie] has a historical side—one that theology, as it has developed, can neglect only to its own detriment.”⁴¹ The discovery of the historical dimension was crucial, as it now enabled scholars to consider the expressions of different cultures as expressions of one and the same religious tendency irrespective of their specific contents. Animistic rites, nature symbolism, and myth could now all be reduced to the common denominator of religion

38. Roth did not include Africa in this list, considering its cultures to belong to the lowest level of religious development. According to him, their “religion” did not extend beyond the most basic forms of animism and therefore were excluded from purview.

39. Cited in *Rudolf von Roth, 1821–1895*, 43. The authors refer to Ulrich Nanko, *Die Geschichte des Lehrstuhls für Vergleichende Religionswissenschaft an der Eberhard-Karls-Universität Tübingen (1848–1945)*. MA Dissertation, University of Tübingen, 1980 as the source. Unfortunately, in spite of a request to the author, we have been unable to source this work.

40. *Ibid.*, 42 (see preceding note for the source).

41. Roth, “Zur Geschichte der Religion,” *Theologische Jahrbücher* 5 (1846): 346.

and thus studied in a comparative perspective. Roth thus distinguished between peoples who had developed advanced forms of religion from those who had failed to develop such forms. The latter were discussed only at the margins of his work.

But even though this approach seems naturally conducive to a historical perspective, Roth rejected (as we have seen) Bauer's approach.⁴² In the transcript of one of his lectures we read: "(according) to the chronological order, we must arrange the peoples [of the world] as they entered the stage of world-history, but what would we do then with the peoples who did not appear on this stage, such as the Indians. . . ."⁴³ Rather, he adopted what might be called a morphological approach to the study of religions, best encapsulated in his statement that "the knowledge of the heathen religions will have a similar value for the understanding of Christianity, its form and its history, as the knowledge of other organisms [have had] for the understanding of the human body."⁴⁴ Undeniably, there is a certain echo of traditional theology here, which also made place for the study of "heathen" religions under the heading of "mythology" as a propaedeutic to Christianity. Indeed, at times, Roth appears to be very close to Bauer's historical understanding. In one place he states, "In ancient times, the identity of human nature in all individuals of the race was not thought of: this much is evident even in the distinction already mentioned as drawn by every cultivated nation between itself and the barbarians. The recognition of this identity makes its earliest appearance in Hebrew prophecy, shows itself later in Buddhism, and becomes complete in Christianity. We ought not therefore be surprised, if we do not find this exalted thought among the ancient Indians, twelve or fifteen centuries before Christ."⁴⁵ There are clear resonances between Bauer's idea of a continual evolution of spirit in the direction of greater self-consciousness (its ultimate stage, of course, being found in the practitioner of the historical-critical method) and Roth's idea of the progressive emergence of the concepts of individuality and equality. But if Roth nonetheless rejected a historical perspective, the reasons for this must be sought elsewhere, specifically in a narrative of degeneration that accompanied his morphological-moral approach to religion.

42. Roth certainly took history seriously; in fact, he was interested in studying the universal laws that governed the manifestation and evolution of religions, laws that we might call laws of historical development. What he rejected, however, was the kind of (Hegelian) metanarrative Bauer had recounted. Thus, while individual religions may progress or decay (and accordingly could be evaluated as being more or less advanced), one could not regard one religion as the logical successor to another. Each retained its morphological uniqueness; the only perspective from which a universal contemplation of the religions of the world was possible was hence not Christianity (as it had been for Bauer), but the new discipline of a universal history of religions. And yet, with this move, Roth reinstated (albeit in secularized and disguised form) the primacy of a Christian view of the world.

43. Cited in *Rudolf von Roth, 1821–1895*, 41. The authors cite "die Nachschrift Widmanns" as the source, but do not provide further information.

44. *Rudolf von Roth, 1821–1895*, 41.

45. Roth, "On the Morality of the Veda," 345.

2. The Search for the Causes of Decline

Roth's motivation for rejecting a teleological narrative of history was in part salutary: he wished to avoid a self-righteous assessment of other religions from the viewpoint of Christianity, such as that advocated by the Reverend Mitchell. In his response to the reverend, he opposed that "we shall be best enabled to assign to the ancient Indians that place in the scale of moral culture to which they are entitled, by considering what were their fundamental ideas touching the laws of moral obligation, and the relation of man to the gods."⁴⁶ One also detects herein a trace of Ranke's dictum, according to which the historian's task was merely to describe "wie es eigentlich gewesen" ("how it really was").⁴⁷ But there is also a second reason for Roth's rejection of Bauer's teleology, and this was because he advocated an inverse teleology in its place.

This reverse teleology comes to light in the exact same text in which Roth rejected Mitchell's condemnation of the Vedas from the perspective of his (i.e., Mitchell's) nineteenth-century European consciousness. Concluding his refutation of Mitchell with the words, "No one will hesitate to allow to these conceptions a positive moral value, and to esteem a literature in which such ideas are expressed,"⁴⁸ and admonished:

But the Indian nation has not abode by them. It has, indeed, carefully treasured up, and at all times regarded as sacred, the productions of its earliest period; but it has attached the main importance to a worthless supplement, and lost from sight and from knowledge the truly valuable portion. Only once in the whole long course of its later history has it enjoyed a period worthy of being compared with that primitive one: during the first ages, namely, of Buddhism. Those, then, who are called to labor in the wide field of Indian missions may confidently hold up before the people its own antiquity as a model: not in order that it progress no further than that; but that it may see how its ancestors, in their simplicity, were nearer the purity of truth than their descendants, in their self-satisfied arrogance; and how the former cherished none of those follies and errors in which they themselves are apparently hoping to find their salvation for now and hereafter.⁴⁹

Wherein did the causes of this degeneracy lie? Roth provided a hint a few lines below. Whereas in the Vedic hymns we find evidence that the "high spiritual endowments" that belong "of right to the Indo-European family of nations" are "still fresh and vigorous in the most eastern branch of [this] family;" later, they are "disfigured" by "manifold excrescences of peculiar views and customs." Roth made no bones about his distaste for these views and customs. They have, so he claimed, "so deformed the later Indian people, that, were it not for their language [i.e., Sanskrit, or the

46. Ibid., 340.

47. On the history of Ranke's phrase, see W. P. Fuchs, "Was heisst das: 'bloss zeigen, wie es eigentlich gewesen'?" *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 11 (1979): 655–67; see also K. Repgen, "Ueber Rankes Diktum von 1824: 'Bloss sagen, wie es eigentlich gewesen,'" *Historisches Jahrbuch* 102 (1982): 439–49.

48. Roth, "On the Morality of the Veda," 346.

49. Ibid., 346–47.

Indo-European family of languages], the European would scarcely recognize them for his own kindred.”⁵⁰

In his foreword to the Petersburg Sanskrit dictionary, Roth further expanded on the theme as follows: he first noted the limited value of the later commentarial tradition in clarifying the Veda. According to him, the classical commentators (he means Sāyaṇa above all) were excellent guides for the “books of theology and ritual.”⁵¹ “Here they are on their ground, where what is at stake is to explain the convoluted, subtle, and quite often sophistic symbolism of the ritual, [where what is at stake is] to elaborate all the countless minute details, on whose observance during worship eternal salvation or damnation depend.” “But it is quite a different matter,” he continued, “when the same men take up the task of an interpretation of the ancient collections of hymns [Roth means the Rg Veda].”⁵²

These texts are not the creations of theological speculation, nor did they spring forth from the ground of that precisely regulated and meticulous liturgical praxis. Rather, they are, for the most part, products of the most ancient religious lyric, whose artistic practice was as little tied to castes and families as the offering of daily sacrifice and prayer. In them was vital a world of divinities [and] was reflected a ritual that was essentially divergent from the system taught in the Brāhmaṇa [texts]. They [i.e., these hymns] spoke a language that was separated from the language of the Brāhmaṇa (which is hardly anything other than the so-called classical Sanskrit) by as great a gulf as the Latin of the Salian hymns from that of M. Terrentius Varro.⁵³

Curiously, as vague as Roth remained on the exact contours of this decline (other than to reiterate that Hinduism was far removed from the original religion), he was precise as to where the blame lay:

The very same qualities that make commentators preeminent guides to an understanding of the theological books make them unusable guides in that far more ancient and completely different field....⁵⁴

And it is not just that the later commentators reinterpret (and hence falsify) the revelation, but that they do it out of ulterior motives:

If the order of the ritual appeared to them as impossible to contemplate as ever being otherwise and [hence] as existing from the beginning of the world, then the

50. Ibid., 347.

51. Rudolf von Roth, “Vorwort,” in Otto Böhtlingk and Rudolf von Roth, *Sanskrit-Wörterbuch*, vol. 1 (St. Petersburg: Kaiserliche Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1855), iv. Roth means the Brāhmaṇas here, the primary liturgical texts of the Indian tradition. The Brāhmaṇas are attached to the Vedas and hence the term *Veda* is often used as a collective term for the Vedas and their auxiliary texts. However, Roth makes a programmatic distinction between the former and the latter here.

52. Ibid., v.

53. Ibid.

54. Ibid.

forefathers of the Indian worship of gods must have sacrificed in exactly the same way; if the divine order and the world system of their age were untouchable and divinely revealed truths, the same [order and the same system] necessarily had to be found in the kernel of the revelation, namely, in the hymns of the ancient Rshi, who after all existed in familiar contact with the gods and possessed much greater wisdom than the later born generations.⁵⁵

We shall have to trace this criticism of the priests later because it holds the key to understanding the Protestant context of Roth's understanding of religion. But already we have the answer to our initial question, namely, why did Roth reject Bauer's teleological narrative of history, when so much in his work suggests he would be sympathetic to this narrative? Although overtly Roth's rejection appears to be motivated by an ethical concern (namely, an insistence that all religions are equally valid and hence cannot be considered more or less imperfect approximations of Christianity), there is also a second concern at work here. Roth did not simply defend a morphological approach to religions, which sees them as static manifestations of the one religious spirit common to all peoples. Rather, he also detected an *internal history* to every religion. According to this view, every religion undergoes a process of development from a belief in souls (animism) to the personification and worship of natural forces (nature religion) and, ultimately, faith in a supreme Being (ethical religion). Even though the world's religions cannot be arranged along a historical continuum (as Bauer, for example, argued), one can nonetheless evaluate them with regard to this internal history. As his biographer, student, and successor to the chair at Tübingen, Richard Garbe, commented: "Depending on whether the one or the other of these three roots of religion is developed in an especially pronounced manner, the essence and character of religions can be distinguished in historical time."⁵⁶ Roth's complex relationship to the notion of religious development can be seen from an address written to Böhlingk in 1888, where he referred to a passage of the Atharvaveda that mentions will-o'-the-wisps. He wrote: "It is fortunate that here, although there are spooks, they are at least not the wandering souls of some dead people, which we otherwise find at every step in the latest interpretations of myths."⁵⁷

Roth was thus able to combine a comparative historical approach with an evaluative developmental framework, and the combination of these two lets us finally understand why he rejected the historical approach. As Roth viewed it, every religion experiences phases of growth, decay, and renewal. Traces of these phases (both the positive and the negative) are left behind in the documents of the religion, permitting a reconstruction of their (internal) history. Crucially, such a science of religion also permits us to distinguish relatively pure stages of their genesis from later, more

55. Ibid.

56. Garbe, "Roth, Rudolf," 561.

57. Cited in Garbe, "Roth, Rudolf," 561. Garbe gives the source as Roth's article in the *Festgruss* to Böhlingk (Rudolf von Roth, "Proben aus einer Übersetzung des Atharvan," in *Festgruss an Otto von Böhlingk zum Doktor-Jubiläum, 3. Februar 1888 von seinen Freunden*, ed. Rudolf von Roth [Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1888], 95–99, the quotation is on p. 98).

corrupt manifestations. And that means we can take up an evaluative stance vis-à-vis a specific religion without having to invoke Christianity as a measure. Rather, as Roth saw it, our measure now becomes the pure stage of the religion itself. In practice, of course, that pure stage was most often identified with the origin, as was the case with Indian religions.

We are now in a position to answer the question of why Roth rejected Bauer's historical approach:

1. Rather than apply an external criterion such as Christianity, Roth sought an internal criterion to evaluate religions.
2. Rather than share Bauer's Hegelian confidence in the rationality of history, Roth emphasized the potential for religious development to reverse its course.

With this move, Roth effectively *secularized* the discourse on religions. Bauer still needed Christianity (albeit already in semisecularized form) to endow his historical narrative with meaning. Thus, although Bauer's historical-critical method claimed to be universal, it still betrayed traces of its origins in a specific historical and intellectual context. In contrast, Roth could claim to have overcome the particularity of his situation: because he no longer requires Christianity to evaluate religions, his new *Allgemeine Religionsgeschichte* fulfilled what the historical-critical method (and before it, Christianity) had promised but been unable to do, namely, offer a truly universal reflection on religion.⁵⁸

And yet, when one looks closer, this overt secularization was bought at the price of an evasion. Roth's history of religions is also not without its presuppositions. Crucially, in discarding Bauer's Hegelian understanding of religions, Roth had recurred to an older conception of history, namely, as a narrative of decline and a fall away from the origin. This narrative, of course, was anything but secular, since its inspiration (and its divine sanction) could be found in the Bible itself.

3. Criticisms of the Priesthood

In a recent article, the social scientists Raf Gelders and Willem Derde have shown how Western conceptions of religion were normative for the encounter with non-European cultures.⁵⁹ Gelders and Derde argue that, in the narrative recounted by Western scholars, "both the idea of religious degeneration and the role played by the priests in this process" were key. "On the one hand, the biblical story of a god-given religion that was subsequently corrupted through the course of time was the general framework that structured the history of Christianity and of all the other

58. Obviously, we disagree with this claim. But the argument is dialectical at this stage. In the next section, we discuss why the history of religions, although widely considered a secular form of scholarship, is no less tainted by religious prejudices.

59. Raf Gelders and Willem Derde, "Mantras of Anti-Brahmanism: Colonial Experience of Indian Intellectuals," *Economic and Political Weekly* 38, no. 43 (2003): 4611–617.

so-called religions. On the other hand, because Christianity assigned a primary role to the clergy, religion was an affair of the priests only. Consequently, the mechanism of degeneration had to be found in the priesthood: priests became the instruments of the devil and began to transform the original god-given religion.” This understanding of religion, they suggest, also structured “the European quest for the ‘religious’ elsewhere.”⁶⁰ Thus, while Orientalist scholars “might have presented their case in the garbs of rationality and open-mindedness,” when it came to “the identification of the brahmin ‘priests’ as the cause for the degeneration of religion, the enslavement of the minds of the people, and the preservation of their own caste, their resemblance to the story told by Protestant zealots is remarkable.”⁶¹

Even though both Judaism and Christianity were familiar with the narrative of a degeneration of religion, followed by periods in which God renewed his covenant with his people via one or more elected figures, this narrative first acquired its radical edge with the coming of Protestantism. As the authors note,

Protestantism [did] not alter this conception. On the contrary, Protestant critiques against the institutionalised church strengthened its hold, albeit in a rather peculiar manner. In defiance of the Catholic church, which preserved priesthood exclusively to the selected few, Protestants argued that all believers could be priests. They condemned the institutionalised church as the necessary mediator between man and god: the church had corrupted the true religion and hence, was nothing but an institute of the devil. As no shepherd could lead us to god, each one of us was “responsible” for his own salvation.⁶²

Protestants accusing clerics of corruption of the Bible could count themselves on solid theological ground, for had not Luther himself preached against the confusion of things human and divine? In his preface to his translation of the New Testament, Luther had already warned his followers “not [to] make a Moses out of Christ, or a book of laws and doctrines out of the gospel, as has been done heretofore.” “For the gospel, truly speaking, does not demand works of our own by which we become pious and blessed; indeed it condemns such works.”⁶³ Even more explicit is the brief essay “Von Menschenlehre zu meiden” (Avoiding the Doctrines of Men). Citing Deuteronomy 4.2 (“Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the Lord your God that I give you”), Matthew 15:9 (“These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules”), and 15:11 (“What goes into

60. Ibid., 4611.

61. Ibid., 4613.

62. Ibid., 4614.

63. Martin Luther, “Vorrede zum Neuen Testament (1522),” in *Luther deutsch. Die Werke Martin Luthers in neuer Auswahl für die Gegenwart*, vol. 5 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991), 41. (All citations refer to the electronic version of the ten-volume edition of Luther’s works edited by Kurt Aland [Martin Luther, *Luther deutsch. Die Werke Martin Luthers in neuer Auswahl für die Gegenwart*, vols. 1–10, ed. Kurt Aland (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991)], hereafter cited as *Luther Werke* followed by the volume and page number.)

someone's mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth, that is what defiles them"), Luther accuses the church of introducing rules, religious orders, and observances that lack scriptural sanction. The priests, he says, are "liars, for at times they introduce and force even holy scripture and the words of the Fathers into their doctrines, as we see daily. But that is false and a perversion, since the scripture is completely against them."⁶⁴ Concluding with Proverbs 30.5–6 ("Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. Do not add to his words, or he will rebuke you and prove you a liar"), he once again emphasizes that one should only preach the word of God, for as Christ says (Matthew 23:8): "Laßt euch nicht Meister heißen. Ein Meister ist in euch, Christus."⁶⁵ Commenting on the significance of this essay, Aland remarks that the title of the essay ("Von Menschenlehre zu meiden") "could stand as the title for the entire volume. For this is what is at stake for Luther in his 'struggle for the pure doctrine'⁶⁶: to let God's word come into its proper right and to keep all human additions and falsifications at a distance from it." These additions "lead immediately to error: to Catholicism, to the Spiritualists [Schwärmer], to the Anabaptists, etc. It is human doctrines that constitute the essence of Catholicism just as much as of the sectarian movements."⁶⁷

Returning to Gelders and Derde, we observe that this view also influenced the work of early Orientalists. "When Europe confronted the 'pagan world' a second time, the Judeo-Christian theme of an original true religion and its subsequent degeneration still structured Europe's conception of the history of the 'religious.'"⁶⁸ Consequently, Western scholars tended to assume a similar narrative of degeneracy, irrespective of the tradition they were studying. In the Indian context, this meant that Brahmins were "identified as 'priests,' who created 'brahmanism,' which was imposed upon Indian society."⁶⁹

The mechanism of corruption was also the same. "What they [i.e., the Brahmins] imposed upon society as part of their religion must have been the work of the devil as well."⁷⁰ As with the church, this imposition mainly took the form of a corruption of "scripture." Thus, not only was there a need to identify "religions" among other cultures, but also there was a need to identify suitable scriptural texts.

The search for the carefully hidden "religious texts" became one of Europe's obsessions. Differences between the "pure original" as embodied in those texts and that which the priests imposed upon the laity confirmed that priesthood was a similar phenomenon all over the world. The Catholic church knew of pilgrimages and

64. Martin Luther, "Von Menschenlehre zu meiden (1522)," *Luther Werke*, vol. 4, 38.

65. Translation from the 1522 sermon. In his 1545 edition, he translates, "Aber ihr sollt euch nicht Rabbi nennen lassen; denn einer ist euer Meister, Christus; ihr aber seid alle Brüder." The New International Version reads: "But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers."

66. "Der Kampf um die reine Lehre" is the title of a book published in 1525 by Luther; it contains the essay "Von Menschenlehre zu meiden (1522)."

67. Kurt Aland, "Editorische Bemerkung," *Luther Werke*, vol. 4, 341.

68. Gelders and Derde, "Mantras of Anti-Brahmanism," 4615.

69. *Ibid.*, 4611.

70. *Ibid.*, 4615.

indulgences; brahmanism displayed “ceremonial and pecuniary atonements.” As the Catholic clergy imposed a system of false prescriptions in its quest for worldly power, brahmins imposed a system of rules and prescriptions to preserve their own temporal interests. They had their own secret language too, i.e., Sanskrit, and eagerly tried to conceal their fraud.⁷¹

Interestingly, we find all three elements of the Protestant narrative identified by Gelders and Derde in Roth’s work. First, as we saw earlier, Roth was at the forefront of efforts to develop a universal history of religions. Second, he was also active in sourcing appropriate “scriptural texts” for the different religions he identified.⁷² In his writings, he laments the fact that the textual basis for research into the history of religions is as yet insufficient. Third, a brief look at Roth’s writings on religion in India show how deeply he has internalized the Protestant understanding of history.

Thus, the holy books of the ancient peoples were clarified by later centuries according to the dominant systems of theology of the time and according to the higher or lower condition of science in general. Indeed, they were clarified in such a way that this interpretation pretended to be the tradition [itself], that is, it claimed an antiquity and a prestige for itself that it, in truth, did not always possess. Nor has it occurred to anyone, for example, to make our understanding of the Hebrew books of the Old Testament dependent upon the Talmud and the rabbis. In contrast, there is no lack of people who consider it the duty of a conscientious Veda interpreter to translate according to Sâjana, Mahîdhara, and others. Thus, we do not hold as H. H. Wilson does, that Sâjana understood the expressions of the Veda better than every European interpreter, [and] that we hence have nothing more to do than to repeat after him. Rather, we hold that a conscientious European interpreter can understand the Veda more accurately and much better than Sâjana. We do not consider it our immediate task to attain that understanding of the Veda that was prevalent in India a few centuries ago; rather, we seek the meaning that the poets themselves placed in their hymns and sayings.⁷³

The comparison of Sâjana with a rabbi may seem out of place at first, but one must bear in mind that in Luther’s polemics against interpretation, the rabbinical tradition represented the paradigmatic instance of how texts could be corrupted by the tradition. For example, in his “Summarien über die Psalmen und Ursachen des Dolmetschens,” he explicitly justifies his translation choices over against those of the

71. Ibid.

72. See the materials gathered in *Rudolf von Roth, 1821–1895*, cited earlier. Also see “Rudolf von Roth and the South Asia Collection of Tübingen University Library,” paper presented at the 10th World Sanskrit Conference, Bangalore, India, January 7, 1997, and “On Manuscripts and Letters from Rudolf von Roth’s Legacy,” paper presented at the 9th World Sanskrit Conference, Melbourne, Australia, January 9–15, 1994, both by Gabriele Zeller. Zeller was involved in the exhibition on Roth’s life that led to the book on Rudolf von Roth, but the book does not have an author or editor.

73. Roth, “Vorwort,” v.

rabbis. As he notes, he has not “translated as he has out of incomprehension of the language nor out of ignorance of the comments of the Rabbis, but rather scientifically and deliberately [wissenschaftlich und williglich].”⁷⁴ Toward the end of the text, Luther provides a theoretical justification for his approach as follows:

That we now here and in similar passages at times diverge from the grammarians and the rabbis, ought not surprise anyone. For we have followed the rule: where the words permit it and yield a better understanding, there we have not allowed ourselves to be forced into a worse or a different meaning by the grammar made by the rabbis. For as all school teachers tell us: it is not the meaning that ought to serve and follow the words, but the words that ought to serve and follow the meaning.⁷⁵

Roth’s comparison of the Brahmins to the rabbis and of the Veda to the Talmud, moreover, had theological precedent, for Luther had already equated the papists with the Jews. By arguing that a conscientious European interpreter could understand the Veda more accurately than the classical commentators Śāyaṇa, Mahidhara, or Mādhava,⁷⁶ Roth was only following Luther in setting aside the patristic tradition for a return to the fundamentals of the faith. But in pursuing this fundamentalism outside of Christianity, Roth was in effect creating a new clergy: the modern scholar of world religions. As the Protestant pastor was to the Catholic priest, the practitioner of the historical method would be to the Brahmin.

Against this background, we can now understand why Mitchell’s negative assessment, no less than Bauer’s positive outlook, would have been unacceptable to Roth. Both were at odds with a Protestant narrative of a revealed religion that went through periodic cycles of decline, each time before a critical reaction set in ushering a renewal. And this narrative is essential to Roth, not because he is a missionary like Mitchell (in that case, a simple narrative of the evils of heathenism would have sufficed), but because he represents a denizen of that new class we might term the “scientific missionary.”

Of course, neither Mitchell nor Bauer can be accused of being advocates of religious pluralism. Mitchell, a Scottish missionary affiliated with the Free Church of

74. Martin Luther, “Summarien über die Psalmen und Ursachen des Dolmetschens (1533),” *Luther Werke*, vol. 5, 176.

75. *Ibid.*, 178–79. See also Luther’s comments in “On the Jews and their Lies (1543):” “Here in Wittenberg on our parish church there is a sow carved in stone. Under her, young piglets and Jews lie sucking. Behind the sow stands a rabbi who lifts the sow’s right leg and with his left hand he pulls her rear over himself. He bends down and looks most studiously under her rear at the Talmud inside, as if he wanted to read and see something difficult and special. This is most likely where they got their *Shem Hamphoras* from.” Martin Luther, “On the Ineffable Name and on the Lineage of Christ,” in *Martin Luther, the Bible, and the Jewish People: A Reader*, ed. Brooks Schramm and Kirsi I. Stjerna (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 180. (*Shem Hamphoras* is the rabbinical name for the Ineffable God.)

76. Roth mentions Mādhava, the brother of Śāyaṇa in his “Ueber gelehrte Tradition im Alterthume besonders in Indien,” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 21 (1867): 1–9.

Scotland,⁷⁷ pursued an aggressively evangelical agenda in India.⁷⁸ In his book *An Essay on the Best Means of Civilising the Subjects of the British Empire in India*,⁷⁹ Mitchell advocated a program of conversion, justified on the grounds that the colonial power had an obligation to “rescue many millions of our race from a most abject state of civil, intellectual, moral, and religious degradation; and to bless them with an increase of the comforts of life, with a participation of the liberties and laws of Britons, and, above all, with the knowledge of the ‘word of life,’ and the enjoyment of the blessings of salvation.”⁸⁰ Mitchell described the “morality of the Gentoos” as being “deficient, both in extent and in principle.” They had “no perfect standard of morals; none that is free from superstition, dignified in its motives, and not defective in its prescriptions.”⁸¹ “Of other virtues of a higher order and more difficult attainment, which require vigour and fire of soul; of the principles of an elevated philanthropy, of active heroism, and of a noble generosity, such as Christianity would inspire,” he declared the Hindus to be “at once ignorant and destitute.”⁸² Bauer, likewise, had made no bones about which religion he considered the most perfect, although his concern was directed toward Judaism rather than Hinduism. Against this background, the work of Roth, a scholar of religions rather than a theologian, appears almost modern by comparison.

And yet, when one considers the concrete narrative Roth recounts, it is clear that he was no more secular than the self-righteous reverend. For Roth did not disagree with Mitchell’s negative assessment of Indian religion; he merely objects to his anti-fundamentalism. For Roth, the Scottish missionary’s failure would have been precisely that he failed to recognize the messianic potential of the new science. Mitchell had simply opposed the true faith to the “false religion” of the Hindus.⁸³ Even though he had (citing John 5:20) called Christianity the religion of “the true God and eternal life,” by calling Hinduism paganism, he had recognized its absolute alterity. This alterity could not be subsumed; it could at most be eradicated. To be sure, Mitchell

77. An evangelical group that split from the Church of Scotland in the Disruption of 1843, especially active in foreign missions.

78. For a good overview of Mitchell’s literary and missionary activities in India, see Phillip Constable, “Scottish Missionaries, ‘Protestant Hinduism’ and the Scottish Sense of Empire in Nineteenth and Early Twentieth-century India,” *Scottish Historical Review* 86, no. 2: 222 (2007): 278–313. Constable particularly shows how Mitchell initiated “the reconstruction of Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* as a proto-Protestant Christian doctrine under Presbyterian auspices.” *Ibid.*, 294. This would, of course, have been contrary to Roth’s approach, which valorized ancient Indian texts. For a good overview of how a theory of *bhakti* as a religion was constructed in stages by Western Orientalists, see Krishna Sharma, *Bhakti and the Bhakti Movement—a New Perspective: A Study in the History of Ideas* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1989).

79. John Murray Mitchell, *An Essay on the Best Means of Civilising the Subjects of the British Empire in India, and of Diffusing the Light of the Christian Religion throughout the Eastern World* (Edinburgh: W. Blackwood, 1805).

80. *Ibid.*, 14.

81. *Ibid.*, 157.

82. *Ibid.*, 158.

83. See *ibid.*, 187–89.

expects divine things to follow from such an eradication. "How delightful the prospects which open upon the eye of faith in prophetic vision!" he exclaimed.

Christianity prevails universally, the consequences are most blissful. Our race assumes the lovely appearance of one vast, virtuous, peaceful family! Our world becomes the seat of one grand, triumphant, adoring assembly!—At length the scene mingles with the heavens, and, rising in brightness, is blended with the glories on high. The mystery of God on earth is finished. The times of the regeneration are fulfilled. The Son of God descends.⁸⁴

But Roth was now proposing that this alterity could not only be subsumed; it had already been subsumed through his new *Allgemeine Religionswissenschaft*. The object of study of this discipline was not merely the different manifestations of the religious sentiment common to all men. Roth had considered this sentiment to be a natural and ethical law. The morphological and comparative approach was supposed, on the one hand, to describe the individual religions of each people and of the main geographic subdivisions (i.e., Asia, Europe, America, Polynesia). On the other hand, it was also supposed to develop the universal laws governing the appearance of these forms. In his article on the "basic traits of the science of the history of religions,"⁸⁵ Bruno Lindner, Roth's student⁸⁶ and the first chair of history of religions at Leipzig,⁸⁷ clarified the relation of the morphological to the eidetic analysis as follows: the task of *Religionswissenschaft* was "historical research of the individual religions according to their essence and their historically demonstrable development." But the discipline also had a "goal that led beyond that," namely, "to investigate the laws according to which the development of religions takes place." "Only when we may hope," wrote Lindner, "really to be able to demonstrate [the existence of] such universally valid laws are we also justified in speaking of the history of religion, and only then can we rightly claim legitimacy for the science. . . . One may express it thus: the study of the

84. Ibid., 232.

85. Bruno Lindner, "Grundzüge der allgemeinen Religionswissenschaft auf geschichtlicher Grundlage," in *Handbuch der theologischen Wissenschaften*, vol. 3, ed. Otto Zöckler (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1890), 565–708.

86. Roth's influence on Lindner is uncontested. Junginger argues that "Roth's influence on Lindner is clearly visible therein [i.e., in the 'Grundzüge']." Junginger, *Von der philologische zur völkischen Religionswissenschaft*, 26.

87. Lindner had studied with Roth in Tübingen and completed a PhD under him in 1876. In 1877, he was nominated to the chair in Persian and Indian philology at Leipzig. Lindner offered a course on Geschichte der indischen und persischen Religion in 1881 and began offering courses in Allgemeine Religionsgeschichte from 1882 onward. From 1885 onward, he began to alternate irregularly between Allgemeine Religionsgeschichte and Einleitung in die Religionsgeschichte (listed as "Einführung in die allgemeine Religionsgeschichte" in the 1890 catalogue). From 1887 onward until his retirement in 1919, his chair was converted into the "Planmäßiger außerordentlicher Professur für Arische Sprachen und Religionsgeschichte." A formal chair was first established in 1912 with the nomination of the evangelical theologian Nathan Söderblum in 1912 at the newly founded Religionswissenschaftliches Institut. This was the first and hence oldest chair for Religionswissenschaft in Germany.

history of religion [Religionsgeschichte] initially has the task of being the history of religions [Geschichte der Religionen], but, if it wishes to claim the status of an independent scientific discipline, it can never lose from sight the goal of becoming the history of religion [Geschichte der Religion].”⁸⁸

There can thus be little doubt that Roth, for his all emancipatory and critical tendencies (and we must never forget that at least some German Indologists, especially in the early stages of the discipline, took their role as contributing to the humanist mission quite seriously),⁸⁹ was still fundamentally beholden to a Protestant framework. Occasionally, Roth could be quite explicit on the point:

Theology will not suffer if it goes beyond its immediate boundaries, and discovers in other periods and other regions the similarities, but even more the differences of religious life. In the center of religion-historical research, however, stand the holy books of the Aryans as the oldest and richest source for our knowledge of the forms of faith of two extraordinarily talented tribes [Roth means the Indians and Iranians], as the sole means of access to the religious primordial history of that tribe, which is the bearer of Christianity, as well as already since the beginning of the pre-Christian era [the bearer] of world history.⁹⁰

But for the most part, even when importing elements of the Protestant narrative, the new practitioners of the method chose to maintain a distance from explicit theological concerns. Certainly, Roth cannot be compared with Graul or Francke,⁹¹ both important figures in the establishment of Indology at Halle.⁹² And yet, it was precisely this distancing from explicit theology that was to make his legacy so problematic, for

88. Lindner, “Grundzüge der allgemeinen Religionswissenschaft,” 569.

89. An important source text for this view is Josef Körner’s essay “Indologie und Humanität,” in *Festschrift Moritz Winternitz*, ed. Otto Stein and W. Gampert (Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1933), 117–38. Also important for its profound and cosmopolitan sentiments is Wilhelm von Humboldt’s *Über die unter dem Namen Bhagavad Gītā bekannte Episode des Mahā-Bhārata*, cited earlier.

90. Rudolf von Roth, “Ueber die heiligen Schriften der Arier,” *Jahrbücher für deutsche Theologie* 2 (1857): 141. Also see Roth’s “Die höchsten Götter der arischen Völker,” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 6 (1852): 67, where Roth introduces his project of illuminating notions of divinity among the Āryans with the words: “the great family of tribes, to which we also belong.”

91. August Hermann Francke (1663–1727) was the founder of the Franckesche Stiftung, a major supporter of the missionary activities of the Dänische-Hallesche Mission. Karl Graul (1814–64) was the director of the Leipzig Mission and was active in south India. The Evangelisch-Lutheranische Mission zu Leipzig, as it was properly known, was considered the successor to the Dänische-Hallesche Mission. Its activities led to the establishment of the Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church in 1919.

92. The differing circumstances of the Halle school of Indology are covered by Hanco Jürgens in “German Indology *avant la lettre*: The Experiences of the Halle Missionaries in Southern India 1750–1810,” in *Sanskrit and Orientalism: Indology and Comparative Linguistics in Germany, 1750–1958*, ed. Damodar SarDesai, Peter K. J. Park, and Douglas McGetchin (Delhi: Manohar, 2004), 41–82; and in “German Indologists *Avant la Lettre*, Changing Horizons of the Halle Missionaries in Southern India,” in *Halle and the Beginning of Protestant Christianity in India*, vol. 3, ed. Andreas Gross, Y. Vincent Kumarados, and Heike Liebau (Halle: Verlag der Franckeschen Stiftungen, 2006), 1047–91.

Roth would not abandon the claim to a superior, critical, and forthright method as compared with the priests' manipulations.

4. Polemics over Method

We have seen how Roth had accepted the Protestant narrative of religious degeneration and sought to demonstrate it of other cultures as well. One might even suppose that this cyclical structure (i.e., degeneration followed by renewal) constituted one of those basic laws scholars of religion of the nineteenth century were in search of. Roth, for example, used the narrative of degeneration as a basic hermeneutic principle for making sense of Indian religious history, and once the principle was in place, he could be quite colorful in his descriptions of the process of ruin. "If one looks," he wrote,

at the religious and universal human content of these Vedic gods, at the evenness of the form, in which they stand with all the freshness of originality before the consciousness of the Indian, far from the monstrousness and hideousness of the later creations of a perverted fantasy, one will not be able to accept the developments of the later period as a natural progression; if one furthermore notices the ethical orientation which manifests itself in the individual forms, the honesty and uprightness of the pious feeling in a large number of these hymns . . . one will have to say, something better was destined for the nation [Roth means the Indians] than it at any time afterward was able to realize.⁹³

And even though he concluded that "the period of this decline, of this perversion of a beautiful beginning into a bad outcome" is "still quite dark for us," these deficits in historical knowledge did not worry him further. It was evident that the decline must have taken place as the Āryans (for Roth accepted this category as much as any scholar of his time) "moved . . . ever further south."⁹⁴ Once again, it was the priests who were at the forefront of this corruption of the Āryan spirit:

Religion and worship now entered their hands [i.e., the hands of the Brahmins], and their privileges attached to them, a scholastic theology was developed, all religious forms became rigid and hence alien to the lively consciousness of the people. Further, the immense influence of the tropical nature surrounding them, the gradual disappearance of the recollection of the holy antiquity in the North, the admixture with other races, whose successor they became—the caste of the Çudra [Śūdra] is originally absent from the Veda—briefly, a return to the ancient or its continuation became impossible and whereas on the one hand ancient sacrifices and prayers were ever more precisely determined and became liturgical formulae, on the other

93. Roth, "Zur Geschichte der Religion," 357.

94. *Ibid.*

completely new and essentially different cults set in, ones as different from the old religion as can be.⁹⁵

Bear in mind this part of Roth's argument because the narrative of decline (the content, if one will) was not distinct from the framing of the scholar's task (the form the scholarship took). Content and form mutually conditioned each other. In fact, the former directly engendered the latter. If Indian texts had been correctly preserved and interpreted, there would be nothing for the critical scholar to do. He could at most read, learn from, enjoy, and possibly even praise these texts. But the narrative of decline, introduced uncritically and defended dogmatically, opened up previously unimagined horizons for scholarship. It practically obligated the scholar to work out an alternative hermeneutic to Indian texts.

The critical potential of this new discipline was, moreover, radically sharpened by debates that had already been underway within Christianity since the Reformation concerning the interpretation of scripture.⁹⁶ These debates had culminated in the establishment of the *altprotestantische Schriftprinzip* of *sola scriptura* or the notion that one can derive the meaning of scripture purely from the text rather than needing recourse to an interpretive tradition.⁹⁷ The Neo-Protestant theologians, however, progressively distanced themselves from this principle. This change was not a break with the principle of *sola scriptura* (even though it was interpreted as such by some), but, rather, a further radicalization of the critical potential of the latter. Luther's innovation had already initiated a radical turn toward the text. Traditional biblical hermeneutics had distinguished between the *sensus litteralis (historicus)* and *sensus spiritualis (mysticus)*. Luther, however, insisted that "neither a derivation nor an allegorical meaning be permitted for any passage, so long as the unambiguous context of the words and the absurdity of the state of affairs before one, which conflicts with even a single article of faith, did not demand it." Rather, "everywhere one must follow the simple, pure, and natural meaning of the words, as required by grammar and the use of language as God has created it among men."⁹⁸ Commenting on the passage, Krauss notes "that, however, means: *the research into scripture that emerged under the principle of 'sola scriptura' must be oriented purely toward the sensus litteralis sive historicus.*"⁹⁹ This emphasis on literal meaning was the primary impetus for the growth of the historical-critical school, whose history we have traced here and in the introduction. It also led to

95. *Ibid.*, 358.

96. Scott S. Ickert offers a brief yet illuminating account of these debates in his "Catholic Controversialist Theology and *Sola Scriptura*: The Case of Jacob van Hoogstraten," *The Catholic Historical Review* 74, no. 1 (1988): 13–33.

97. For a good overview of the establishment of this principle, see the first chapter of Hans-Joachim Krauss, *Geschichte der historisch-kritischen Erforschung des Alten Testaments von der Reformation bis zur Gegenwart* (Neukirchen: Verlag der Buchhandlung des Erziehungsvereins, 1956).

98. Martin Luther, "Vom unfreien Willen (1525)," *Luther Werke*, vol. 3, 267.

99. Krauss, *Geschichte der historisch-kritischen Erforschung*, 8 (*italics in original*).

the emergence of new philological methods, of textual criticism, and of literary and historical criticism.

Roth practically incarnates the new critical consciousness associated with the rise of historical research. In numerous texts, he opposes his new method to the tradition. In his preface to the Petersburg dictionary, he compares the critical scholar to someone who uses his eyes (and believes only what his eyes tell him) as compared with someone who relies on the words of others (who assert something obviously contradictory to experience). "Our glance at these books [Roth means the Veda]," he says, "[must] be more weighty than the testimony of the glossers."¹⁰⁰ The use of subjective *iudicium* over the tradition is justified in terms of the fact that "completely different skills" are required for the interpretation of the Veda (i.e., completely different from those required for the later ritual and theological speculations, the Brāhmaṇas). Further, here there is also need of "a freedom of one's judgment, a wider horizon, and a greater extent of historical insight." The modern scholar clearly takes precedence over the ancient commentator here, for "freedom of judgment was absent among all the peoples of heathen antiquity and at no time in the history of India did one have any awareness of historical development." Commenting on their own work in the dictionary, Roth writes: "We have attempted to follow the path that linguistics [Sprachwissenschaft] prescribes: to extract the meaning from the texts themselves through collecting all passages that are related [either] in terms of their form or their content; a long and strenuous path, but one on which neither the commentators nor the translators have proceeded before us."¹⁰¹ Elsewhere, he clarifies the distinction between a traditional and a scientific interpretation thus: "It [the transmission] will aim at the meaning and content of the whole, without anxiously hanging on to the [individual] word, whereas the scientific interpretation will begin with the individual, the word and its form, and thence seek to become master of the meaning of the word as well. In a word, it is grammatical."¹⁰² This is precisely what biblical philology, following Luther's principles of translation, demanded. Roth also echoes Luther's criticisms of Origen and the Fathers (collectively lambasted by Luther as the "Sophists" in his "Vom unfreien Willen" of 1525). According to him, the Brāhmaṇas (which we might compare with the great Summas of the Latin Middle Ages) are the ones that have "damaged the simple historical sense the most and opened the floodgates to arbitrariness [of every kind]." Nor can they claim the weight of tradition, for "however far back we go, we still do not see any tradition, that is, a continuity of understanding."¹⁰³ Roth's criticisms of the tradition reach a crescendo toward the end of his article. He writes:

Research and inquiry begins, by nature, where no one any longer knows the answer to a question out of his immediate knowledge. And what one commonly calls tradition is nothing other than the history of the attempts at a solution, not the solution itself.¹⁰⁴

100. Roth, "Vorwort," iii.

101. *Ibid.*, v.

102. Roth, "Ueber gelehrte Tradition im Alterthume," 5.

103. *Ibid.*, 7.

104. *Ibid.*

Whoever does not find the countless errors and tastelessness sufficient can convince himself in a historical manner as well that these [interpretations] in themselves do not possess any authority; that to invoke them is to give up, unjustifiably, [the use of] one's own judgment and that every scientific proof against the entire tradition insofar as it is founded on evidence must remain victorious, no matter how great the reputation of the tradition and be it ever so old; that it [i.e., the tradition] correctly used as an aid can perform the most significant services, but if taken as a guideline it can only inhibit and mislead us.¹⁰⁵

Roth's insistence that there is no true tradition is understandable, since the rejection of tradition is a *sine qua non* for the emergence of a new class of professional interpreters. In effect, Roth was only transferring arguments that had already been applied vis-à-vis other theological approaches within the European context to the Indian context. And he was doing so in full knowledge of the iconoclastic potential of his criticism. As he clarified in a later essay, "The halo that in the eyes of some surrounded Indian exegesis is thus fundamentally destroyed, and we may now stand on our own feet."¹⁰⁶ The former, Roth clarified, was to be rejected because "the intellectual horizon of these monastic [klösterliche] interpreters was extremely narrow and unchanging."¹⁰⁷ Just as attacks on Roman Catholic clergy had been a factor in the institution of a new Protestant ministry,¹⁰⁸ so would the attacks on Brahmanic commentators be essential to the institution of Indology.

5. Universal Consciousness and Eschatological Universalism

Although Roth and other Indologists claimed to be in possession of a superior critical consciousness, this consciousness, surprisingly, was never itself subject to question. One of the most striking things about writings from the period is the complete absence of self-reflexivity. In histories of the discipline and in public statements (such as Oldenberg's fawning 1919 article "Indische und klassische Philologie"¹⁰⁹), Indologists took the universality of their method for granted. Yet, key aspects of the narrative Indologists recounted about their discipline (its having overcome particularism and of having attained conditions for a critical, transhistorical, and universal contemplation) bore an uncanny resemblance to the narrative Protestants told about

105. Ibid.

106. Rudolf von Roth, "Zur Geschichte des Sanskrit-Wörterbuchs (Gesprochen in der Versammlung der Orientalisten zu Innsbruck, am 29. Sept. 1874)," *Bulletin de l'Académie impériale des sciences de St.-Petersbourg* 21 (1876): 421.

107. Ibid., 422.

108. For a discussion of the role played by Luther's criticisms in this process, see Marcel Niesen, *Die Erfindung des Theologen* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006). Of course, the criticisms were only one factor in what was a complex and many-layered process.

109. Hermann Oldenberg, "Indische und klassische Philologie," *Neue Jahrbücher für das klassische Altertum, Geschichte und deutsche Literatur und für Pädagogik* 17 (1906): 1–9; reprinted in Hermann Oldenberg, *Kleine Schriften*, vol. 2, ed. Klaus L. Janert (Wiesbaden: Fritz Steiner Verlag, 1967), 1515–523. All citations refer to the original.

themselves. The universality Indologists professed was disturbingly Eurocentric.¹¹⁰ Although their methods and attitudes had undergone an overt secularization (becoming nominally universal in the process), religious concerns nonetheless permeated these methods and attitudes at every level. Most significantly, their professed universalism had been attained, first, through creating a specific narrative of history (history as the process of progress from particularism to universalism and from faith to reason) and, second, through extending this narrative of history to all peoples. What was in reality an artful form of theology (an eschatology, to be precise) had, through being translated into secular terms, been projected as the necessary course of evolution of the world (as a teleology, in other words). And because this evolution had been projected as both necessary and rational (and ethically desirable), those who rejected it could be portrayed as refusing to participate in the movement of reason itself.

Yet, as compelling as this narrative was, it implicated the Indologists in a kind of double bind. Because their interpretations were now tacitly underwritten by this theoretical premise, a historical metanarrative that conferred universality and exclusivity on their interpretations, they were now forced constantly to denigrate the tradition. What little scientificity their interpretations possessed was due to the fact that *they*, rather than the tradition, were consonant with the idea of reason. The tradition had been superseded not through exposing its shortcomings, but by projecting a narrative of historical reason capable of subsuming all earlier stages of history within itself. No dialogue had occurred, but, more importantly, no dialogue *could* occur, because to enter into dialogue with tradition would mean implicitly to surrender Indology's claim to being absolute. And thus, concrete interpretation of Indian texts was indissolubly linked to the task of a critique of tradition. The tradition is not critical, it is not trustworthy, it is not self-reflexive, and it is theological, confessionally bound, and so on. Most of all, there is no true tradition, that is, nothing that can be normative for the scholar. The movement of reason had simply left the past behind it, so that the only way left to engage it was to engage it historically.¹¹¹

In the case of Indology (as with perhaps all other disciplines that advance totalizing claims), a history of German Indology was also hindered by the fact that the discipline did not make space for critical self-reflection. Because it posited itself as the end of history, part of a process innate to reason itself, it could not use other perspectives

110. See, for instance, Slaje's comments in his "Was ist und welchem Zwecke dient die Indologie," cited earlier, and see also *ibid.*, *passim* for his use of "Europe," "European," and "Europeanization." In all, the terms occur thirty-nine times within the space of twenty pages.

111. Yet here too the history that the Indologists recounted was alloyed with their own concerns. They could not develop an objective account of the history of India as long as their own prestige was based upon polemicizing against the tradition. Thus, although central elements of the story Indologists told about India, such as corruption of the priesthood, rise of obscurantism and ritualism, and falsification of scripture can be explained out of their Protestant context, the fact that they *needed* to portray the history of India as one of religious degeneration cannot be blamed upon Protestantism. It was simply a consequence of an inner requirement of their discipline.

(such as the Indian tradition) to contemplate and critique itself. And as long as it did not do so, the fiction could be sustained that Indology was a universal, necessary, and hence rational, science. But although it claimed to embody a universal consciousness, it would be more correct to describe it as a form of eschatological universalism. Whereas a truly universal consciousness is universal in the sense of being turned toward the whole (the Greek *kata ton holon*), the latter is universal only because it considers itself to have superseded and subsumed all others within itself.¹¹²

Karl Löwith has suggested that “modern history of philosophy emerges from the biblical faith in the fulfillment [of time] and ends with the secularization of its eschatological prototype [i.e., of biblical faith].”¹¹³ Löwith therefore does not see a stark contrast between Christian ideas of the end of days and modern ideas of the fulfillment of a necessary historical process with the advent of modernity. Löwith argues that the characteristic trait of the *eschaton* is not so much that it “gives an end” to “the course of history,” but that it “structures and fulfills it through a definite goal.”¹¹⁴ As Link argues, “it is this orientation toward the goal that endows human history with something it does not and cannot have from itself, its *unity*, [it is this that] makes it ‘universal’. It [i.e., human history] is understood from out of its *end* as a uniform process and each of its epochs serves as a preparation for this end state, attains *qua* a transitional phase to this goal.”¹¹⁵ Carl Schmitt, too, speaks of the significant concepts of modern political theory as being “secularized theological concepts.”¹¹⁶ Although both Löwith and Schmitt have been criticized by Hans Blumenberg in his *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*,¹¹⁷ their analysis is compelling in context. The history traced in the earlier sections suggests that even as Indologists thought they were progressing toward a secular universal science of Indian texts, they were, secretly and unbeknownst to themselves, merely incarnating an eschatological (Protestant) consciousness.

To be sure, Roth (and after him, Indologists such as Kirfel, Hacker, and Stietenron) justified his rejection of tradition in terms of (1) the scientificity of the new methods (mainly the historical-critical method, but also linguistics and philology), (2) the agnosticism of the new critical consciousness, and (3) the universality of the new

112. This eschatological universalism may or may not have taken the form of an evangelical universalism. At least in the case of some Indologists (e.g., Roth, Oldenberg, Hacker, Stietenron, Hanneder), we found that it did. But whether it did or not, implied in the very notion of an eschatological universalism is a sense of having superseded the tradition and thus of being its logical and historical successor.

113. Karl Löwith, “Weltgeschichte und Heilsgeschehen. Die theologischen Voraussetzungen der Geschichtsphilosophie (1949/1953),” in *Sämtliche Schriften*, vol. 1, ed. Klaus Stichweh and Marc B. de Launay (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1983), 12.

114. *Ibid.*, 14.

115. Christian Link, “Über den biblischen Umgang mit Geschichte im neuzeitlichen Kontext,” in *Das Alte Testament: Ein Geschichtsbuch?*, ed. Erhard Blum, William Johnstone, and Christoph Marksches (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2005), 190–91.

116. Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985 [1934]), 36.

117. Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), originally published as *Die Legimität der Neuzeit* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1966).

science. The commentarial tradition was in contrast criticized as being unreliable, because (1) it did not have access to modern scientific methods, (2) it was beholden to its dogmas, and (3) it was particularistic, being interested only in its special problems or, worse, being uninterested in the truth altogether.

But here, too, one must exercise caution. Although Indology claimed to practice a “methodological atheism” in the sense that it did not see its method as entailing any theological or metaphysical commitments, in truth the historical-critical method was atheistic only concerning the possibility of transhistorical meaning. Yet history and self-consciousness were both apotheosized. Nor were the Indologists able to present a critical justification for the method itself. On the contrary, discussions of the method almost always took the form of a transcendental justification. Thus, instead of explaining how or why it was necessary to study texts primarily from a historical perspective, history was simply declared an a priori condition for our being able to have knowledge of objects.¹¹⁸ Just as, after Kant, those who failed to recognize the role played in constituting objects by the forms of intuition, space and time, and by the categories of the understanding (*Verstand*) were accused of epistemological naïveté, those who rejected the notion that historical concerns should be dominant in the study of texts would be accused of methodological naïveté.¹¹⁹

Under these conditions, it was impossible for a genuine dialogue to develop between European scholarship and Indian tradition. The claims of Indology to embody a universal consciousness could only be upheld at the price of the destruction of tradition. Indology became extricated in a hegemonic (and quixotic) quest to extend European categories to Indian texts. In the process it committed itself to upholding these categories as the only normative ones. The sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein juxtaposes “European universalism” to what he calls “universal universalism.” He argues that the former has been a “universalism of the powerful,” by which he means that it has also been “a partial and distorted universalism.”¹²⁰ Wallerstein considers that the struggle between these two competing accounts of universalism—the one a Eurocentric account that claims to be universal only because it makes its experience normative for all others; the other a genuine universalism founded on dialogue—to be “the central ideological struggle of the contemporary world,” one whose “outcome

118. This elevation of history is an innate problem in all of historicism; for a good account of nineteenth-century historicism and its overcoming in Heidegger, see Charles R. Bambach, *Heidegger, Dilthey, and the Crisis of Historicism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995).

119. Kant’s aim had been specifically and explicitly to render “metaphysics” impossible (by which he meant Aristotelian philosophy and the Scholastic tradition founded on this philosophy). These antimetaphysical biases nonetheless engendered an entire new philosophical movement. Likewise, the Indologists’ antimetaphysical biases rendered a certain kind of knowledge impossible and engendered yet another. This discourse on India, made possible by the biases of historical consciousness and sustained by the application of the historical-critical method, would become a varied and all-encompassing canon for studying the Orient. And yet, as we noted in the introduction, citing Foucault, this discourse would remain “but the exteriority of accidents.”

120. Immanuel Maurice Wallerstein, *European Universalism: The Rhetoric of Power* (New York: The New Press, 2006), xii.

will be a major factor in determining how...future world-systems...will be structured.”¹²¹ The challenge for us, as Wallerstein sees it, is how “we may move beyond European universalism” (which he calls “this last perverse justification of the existing world order”) to “something much more difficult to achieve,” “a universal universalism, which refuses essentialist characterizations of social reality, historicizes both the universal and the particular, reunifies the so-called scientific and humanistic into a single epistemology, and permits us to look with a highly clinical and quite skeptical eye at all justifications for ‘intervention’ by the powerful against the weak.”¹²² How might Indology, too, have to change to respond to these processes? What kinds of changes might be necessary to the ways in which we engage with the ancient cultures of India as we move away from a Eurocentric Indology to a truly global, objective, and secular engagement with Indian philosophy? If Indology is to cease being a form of narcissistic self-relation, how might we have to rethink the universalist project?

At this point we might reflect upon whether the secularization theology underwent in the history of religions was really as thorough as its advocates argued. In 1908, Troeltsch boasted that the theological faculty had attained a degree of “relative independence” from “ecclesiastical influences.” Protestant theologians, Troeltsch wrote, “consider Protestantism to be the principle of free research in religious matters.” This, however, he conceded, had given “theological science a new character. In truth it is confessionless, Protestant only insofar as the freedom of science is regarded as a Protestant demand.”¹²³ The analysis of Roth’s hermeneutics presented in this section, however, suggests that matters were quite different in the case of Indology. In fact, turning Troeltsch’s statement around, one could say: in truth it is Protestant, confessionless only insofar as the freedom of science is regarded as a confessionless demand. Practically as well, German Indology was to be an overwhelmingly Protestant affair: of the eight scholars whose Gītā interpretations we studied here, only one—Hermann Jacobi—was Catholic; of the remaining seven, one was the son of a Lutheran pastor and, since 1865, principal secretary of the Central Committee for the Inner Mission (*geschäftsführender Sekretär des Central-Ausschusses für die Inner Mission*) (Hermann Oldenberg), another a trained missionary from the Basler Mission (an institution allied with Württemberg Pietism) who worked as a missionary for four years in India (J. W. Hauer), and another a leading Protestant theologian (Rudolf Otto). Rudolf von Roth was closely involved with the planning and administration of the Tübingen Seminary (See table 4.1 for a summary of the religious antecedents of the leading Indologists of the nineteenth century). Beyond the figures who are the subject of this book, we could expand our inquiries to consider the precise role played by the personal religious beliefs of Indologists in their work. The authors are currently working toward a future book mapping Hacker’s troubled relationship to his faith. Further researches along these lines are a clear desideratum.

121. Ibid., xii–xiii.

122. Ibid., 79.

123. Ernst Troeltsch, “Rückblick auf ein halbes Jahrhundert der theologischen Wissenschaft,” *Zeitschrift für wissenschaftliche Theologie* 51 (1908): 100–101; cited and translated in Howard, *Protestant Theology*, 408.

THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF PROTESTANT THEOLOGY IN INDOLOGY

Although we have focused on Rudolf von Roth in telling this narrative, Roth was not a lone figure. The sentiments he voiced vis-à-vis Indian tradition would be echoed hundredfold by scholars in the following century and a half. Albrecht Weber, for example, declared in a letter addressed to Karl Otto von Raumer (Prussian minister of culture between 1850 and 1858):

The study of Indian antiquity has, in the last fifteen years, with the availability of the oldest holy scriptures of the Indians, the Vedas, gained unimaginably and increasingly in both practical and academic significance. The practical significance has affected England in particular and has been acknowledged both there and in India, by the Christian missions as well. The entire weight of the religious and cultural structure of contemporary India appears to rest on the Vedas. As soon as they are unveiled from the mysterious darkness surrounding them till now [*sobald nun diese nicht mehr in ihr bisheriges mysteriöses Dunkel gehüllt sind*], and made accessible to all, all the untruths shall be automatically revealed, and this shall, in time, put an end to the sorry plight of religious decadence [*dem traurigen Zustande der religiöser Versumpfung*] of India. The critical analysis and publication of Vedic texts shall assume a role among the Indians, similar to Luther's translation of the Bible.¹²⁴

Suspicion of the tradition, however, was only one side of the coin. German Indologists also explicitly associated their work with a civilizational, emancipatory, indeed, a reformatory mission. The German-born and German-educated, but London-based Sanskritist, Theodor Goldstücker,¹²⁵ wrote barely ten years after Weber:

124. Albrecht Weber, *Letter to Karl Otto von Raumer, 12.10.1855* (Humboldt University Archives, P. F. 1433); translated and cited in Sengupta, "State, University, and Indology," 278–79. The exact same lines occur in Weber's article "Ueber die Literatur des Sâmaveda," in *Indische Studien. Zeitschrift für die Kunde des indische Alterthums*, vol. 1, ed. Albrecht Weber (Berlin: Ferd. Dümmler's Buchhandlung, 1850), 27, but there the context is a little different: explaining that earlier Jesuit and Protestant missionaries alike had neglected the Vedas, Weber wrote: "...[but] now one has begun evermore to seek out the enemy in his own camp. The entire religious and cultural structure of the Indians rests on the Vedas. As soon as these are no longer veiled in their mysterious darkness, but are available openly and freely to everyone's gaze, the false elements in their alleged reasoning must become evident to all [and] the spirit of religious criticism [*Geist der religiösen Kritik*] awakened and thus, in time, [these two shall] put an end to the sorry plight of religious decadence in India. Whether the Christian Mission will be the winner thereby, as the missionaries believe, is a different question. At any rate, the critical, unprejudiced publication and clarification of these texts must and will, *some day*, assume a role among the Indians similar to Luther's translation of the Bible" (emphasis in original).

125. Goldstücker was Jewish, which especially makes our point that German Indology cannot be identified with nationality or religion. The Protestantism we have referred to has to do with a certain constellation of ideas whose history is inextricably linked to German Protestantism; it does not refer to a specific creed or faith and if it does, it refers at most to a methodological creed.

When, by priestcraft and ignorance, a nation has lost itself so far as to look upon writings like these as divinely inspired, there is but one conclusion to be drawn: it has arrived at the turning-point of its destinies. Hinduism stands at this point, and we anxiously pause to see which way it will turn its steps. All barriers to religious imposition having broken down since the modern Purānas were received by the masses as the source of their faith; sects have sprung up which not merely endanger religion, but society itself; tenets have been propounded, which are an insult to the human mind; practices have been introduced, which must fill every educated Hindu with confusion and shame."¹²⁶

Once again, when it came to explaining this state of affairs, Goldstücker turned to recent European history. He argued that "the causes of the gradual degeneracy of Hinduism are, indeed, not different from those to which other religions are subject, when allowed to grow in the dark."¹²⁷ If the diagnosis came from Europe, so, too, the prescription:

In Europe, religious depravity received its check when the art of printing allowed the light of publicity to enter into the book whence her nations derive their faith; and no other means will check it in India than the admission of the masses to that original book which is always on their lips, but which now is the monopoly of the infinitesimal fraction of the Brahminical caste able to understand its sense."¹²⁸

Given the dominant role played by the European historical and hermeneutic horizon, it was unsurprising that Indologists, for the most part, regarded themselves as liberators. Scholarly and charitable concerns coincided. By reading Indian texts critically (which is to say with a Protestant metanarrative in mind), these scholars really felt they were advancing the cause of India's liberation. Rather than seeing themselves as iconoclasts, they saw themselves as engaged in a humanitarian-historicist project to restore Indian texts to their pristine original condition. When needed, they could make common cause with the Indian public. As Goldstücker argued, "If those intelligent Hindus of whom we are speaking have the will and the energy to throw open that book, and the literature connected with it, to the people at large, without caring for the trammels imposed on caste by the politicians of late ages we have no misgivings as to the new vitality which they will impart to its decaying life."¹²⁹ Rather than seeing themselves as fundamentalists urging a return to the "religion of the book," they saw themselves as participating in a public-spirited mission—a global coalition to bring the fruits of enlightened democracy to all peoples. The outcome of these efforts Goldstücker claimed, was "foreshadowed... by what their forefathers attempted to do, but did not succeed in accomplishing, because they had not the courage to break through the artificial bonds which had already in their day enslaved

126. Goldstücker, "The Inspired Writings of Hinduism," 163.

127. *Ibid.*

128. *Ibid.*, 163–64.

129. *Ibid.*, 164.

Hindu society.”¹³⁰ How, then, could the thought enter their minds that their methods were not wanted?

Second and third generation Indologists, who were now operating within the confines of an institutionalized ideology, were still less capable of attaining self-reflexive clarity about their discipline.¹³¹ They simply inculcated these prejudices within themselves. We may never know how much of this was an attempt to conform to dominant ideology and how much was motivated by genuine racism. By the mid-twentieth century, as Indian scholars begin to take a more assertive stance, we find a number of explicit statements decrying those who had mounted an indigenous intellectual response as being little more than Western-trained agents.¹³² What was problematic about this process was not that Indologists were becoming more racist, but that they were forgetting the reasons for their original disparagement of the tradition—and that meant they were forgetting the historical processes within Christianity itself that had led to certain views of texts becoming canonical. Scholars from Peter Gaeffke to Paul Hacker, Heinrich von Stietencron, Angelika Malinar, Walter Slaje, Michael Witzel, and Jürgen Hanneder would make comments that in any other context would be condemned as racist. To be sure, some such as Hanneder would attempt to ground racial portrayals in the alleged contrast between the secularism of the (mainly Western or Western-trained) scholar and the religiosity of tradition.¹³³ Thus, Hanneder claims that the reason for excluding the *pāṇḍitya* from discourse was “not to belittle traditional Indian learning, but a methodological necessity.” In his opinion, “‘Western’ Indology with its specifically historically oriented, critical

130. Ibid.

131. Only in a few rare cases have Indologists shown an interest in a critical illumination of their discipline. Among scholars who have tackled the the problematic legacy of Indology are Eli Franco and Karin Preisendanz (in their *Beyond Orientalism*, cited earlier). Unsurprisingly, they have been attacked as traitors to the cause of Indology.

132. See, for example, the statements of the University of Pennsylvania professor Peter Gaeffke in “A Rock in the Tides of Time: Oriental Studies Then and Now,” cited earlier, and see also the comment on p. 71: “With the advent of postwar nationalism in the Third World, the incompatibility of Eastern and Western epistemological approaches suddenly became a political issue in many regions of Asia . . . [and] Western Orientalist shortcomings were gradually revealed by resentful Indians. Generally speaking, it was the scholars from the Near East who found Western scholarship most intrusive, often regarding it as some sort of usurpation of the past by representatives of the former colonialists. In most of this basically political debate, the violent attacks came not from scholars in the *Orient*, but from Easterners trained in *Western* universities who were aware of the internal debates among Western humanists.” Even though fallacious (the argument is a form of ad hominem circumstantial), the idea that Eastern critiques of Orientalism are invalid because they are voiced by Western accomplices rather than authentic representatives of the tradition is a commonplace among Orientalists. Its origins probably can be traced back to the writings of Paul Hacker, especially his “Aspects of Neo-Hinduism as Contrasted with Surviving Traditional Hinduism,” in *Kleine Schriften*, ed. Lambert Schmithausen (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1978), esp. 582–83. (The article was originally presented at a talk at the University of London in 1970). For a discussion, see Joydeep Bagchee and Vishwa Adluri, “The Passion of Paul Hacker,” cited earlier.

133. See his Review of *The Pandit*, cited earlier, pp. 671–72; also see his “Search the Web: ‘Deutsche Indologie,’” in *Marburger Indologie im Umbruch: Zur Geschichte des Faches 1845–1945* (Munich: P. Kirchheim Verlag, 2010), 81–87.

approach, had to make use of the Indian *pāṇḍitya* in order to get as much first-hand information as possible, but it could not accept its theological dimension without compromising its aims as a historical subject.”¹³⁴

Yet before we accept this dominant narrative, we would do well to inquire into the historical roots of our own praxis as scholars. Susan Ritchie puts it well, when she writes that “what is commonly termed ‘secularization’ (the blurring of the boundary between the sacred and the profane, as that which was sacred enters everyday life) might just as appropriately be referred to as ‘sacralization’ (the blurring of the boundary between the sacred and the profane, as that which was profane takes on sacred qualities).”¹³⁵ Examining the consequences of this insight for reflexive methodology in “belief studies” in general, Ritchie argues:

The sacralization of culture, as the willingness to see ultimate value expressed in or through even the everyday lives of ordinary people, began with the Reformation, was motivated by explicitly liberalizing Protestant interests, and was a process for which folkloristics, and later religious studies, invented special technologies. It is somewhat disingenuous, then, for belief studies to posit its methodological difficulty as the development of the secular culture that the field itself helped to author, and from which, in a large part, it achieved its legitimation; nor is it surprising that reflexive methodologies would fail in the absence of careful attention to such issues of disciplinary interestedness. Strangely enough for these post-Foucauldian times, most of the models so far articulated tend to see the promise of self-reflexive and reciprocal methodologies as lying in the conscious revelation of the individual investigator’s religious predilections rather than in the disclosure of the religious and theological interests that still transverse these fields. Ironically, here is where we see these methodologies betray what I argue is their remaining Protestant complicity: faith in most of these models remains a matter of individual expression—something that is private and invisible until and unless an individual chooses to voice his or her own conviction—something, in short, about which it is possible to be reflexive in a personal and individualizing way. Yet the unacknowledged Protestant origin and alliance of our interpretive technologies insure a continued Eurocentrism to our work....¹³⁶

Can one in light of these calls for a fundamental reappraisal of the roots of our scholarly praxis, continue to sustain the fiction of a radical separation between “theology and Religionswissenschaft”? Can one maintain that Western Indology, with its “specifically historically oriented, critical approach,” cannot reconcile itself with tradition without thereby “compromising its aims as a historical subject”?¹³⁷ Or do these statements evince a problematic consciousness, problematic because it is based

134. Hanneder, Review of *The Pandit*, 672.

135. Susan J. Ritchie, “Contesting Secularism: Reflexive Methodology, Belief Studies, and Disciplined Knowledge,” *Journal of American Folklore* 115, no. 457/458 (2002): 444.

136. *Ibid.*, 444–45.

137. Hanneder, Review of *The Pandit*, 672.

Table 4.1 BIOGRAPHIES OF GERMAN INDOLOGISTS STUDIED^a

Indologist Name	Confession/Service	Family Background	Academic Background	Philosophical training?	Influences/Teachers	Missionary Activity ^b	Political Affiliation/Service	Visited India?
Adolf Holtzmann Sr. (1810–70) ^c	Protestant/ vicar in Kandern (1831–32)	Father a professor in Karlsruhe; brother, Karl Julius Holtzmann, evangelical theologian and prelate of the evangelical church	Theology (1828–31, theological qualifying exam in 1831), German, Sanskrit (1832–?)	No	Friedrich Schleiermacher, Othmar Frank, Eugène Burnouf	None	Not known	No
Rudolf Roth (1821–95) ^d	Protestant, since the age of 17 a student of the Tübingen Seminary/ intended to join the priesthood	Father senior auditor, conservative family background with significant numbers appointed clerics; uncle, Karl Johann Friedrich Roth, president of consistory in Bavaria; second uncle, Karl Ludwig Roth, a prelate	Theology (1838–43, theological qualifying exam in 1842), Oriental languages	No	F.C. Bauer, Heinrich Ewald, Eugène Burnouf, Julius Mohl, Max Müller, PhD under Ewald (1843), Habilitation under Ewald (1845), honorary PhD in theology (1877)	None	Superintendent of the Tübingen Seminary (1853–73)	No
Albrecht Weber (1825–1901) ^e	Protestant, attended convent school at Roßleben/ editor of <i>Protestantische Zeitstimmen</i>	Deeply religious, son of an economist	Sanskrit, Oriental languages, comparative linguistics, history	No	A.F. Stenzler, Christian Lassen, Franz Bopp, A. Kuhn, Rudolf Roth, PhD under Stenzler (1845), Habilitation under Bopp (1848)	None	Critic of Indian religions, argued for bringing about a reformation comparable to the Protestant Reformation through the study and exposure of Indian texts as false scriptures	No

(Continued)

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Table 4.1 (Continued)

Indologist Name	Confession/Service	Family Background	Academic Background	Philosophical training?	Influences/Teachers	Missionary Activity ^b	Political Affiliation/Service	Visited India?
Adolf Holtzmann Jr. (1838–1914) ^f	Protestant	Father pastor in Heidelberg, thereafter prelate in consistory and chaplain to the Grand Duke of Baden; mother daughter of a pastor	Sanskrit, possibly other subjects	No	Adolf Holtzmann/teachers not known, but known to have studied in Heidelberg and Erlangen	None	Not known	No
Hermann Jacobi (1850–1937) ^g	Catholic	Father a mill owner	Mathematics, Sanskrit, comparative linguistics	No	Studied with Albrecht Weber (1868–72), PhD under Johannes Gildemeister (1872), Habilitation under Gildemeister (1875)	None	Not known, acquired the chair at Bonn in a secret deal struck with <i>Kultusminister</i> Althoff	1873–74, 1913–14
Hermann Oldenberg (1854–1920) ^h	Protestant	Father a pastor and executive secretary of the Central Committee for the Inner Mission	Classical philology and Indology	No	Habilitation under Albrecht Weber (1878)	None	Not known	Winter of 1912/13
Richard Garbe (1857–1927) ⁱ	Protestant	Father landed factory owner	Sanskrit	No	Studied with Rudolf Roth (1873–77), PhD under Roth (1876), Habilitation under Roth (1878)	None	Supporter of the British colonial presence in India, which he felt was justified due to the lower level of civilization of the dark races, advocated the disenfranchisement and disgrace of Brahmans and saw himself as a participant in a civilizing mission in which young Indians turn to Western administrators or authority figures	1885–87

Rudolf Otto (1869–1937) ^a	Protestant	Deeply religious evangelical Lutheran family	Theology, history of religions, philosophy of religions	One semester	Martin Luther, St. Paul, Friedrich Schleiermacher/ Franz Reinhold von Frank, Theodor Häring, Richard Garbe, PhD under Garbe (1905)	Contemplated becoming a pastor, or a missionary in China, advocate of the superiority of Christian faith	Member of parliament for the Liberal Party (1913–18), supporter of German cultural presence abroad especially in conjunction with missionary activities, campaigned for public funding for book series titled Sources of the History of Religions	1911/12 and 1927/28
Jakob Wilhelm Hauer (1881–1962) ^{b,c}	Protestant, member of Hahn'sche Gemeinschaft ^d in his youth/ vicar in Tübingen (1915–19)	Deeply religious Pietists, working class background	Studied to become a missionary at the Basel Evangelical Missionary Society, later Sanskrit and history of religions	No	Richard Garbe (1915–18), PhD under Garbe (1918), Habilitation under Garbe (1921)	Missionary in south India (1907–11), founder of the Deutsches Ahnenerbe, director of Arisches Seminar	Member of NSDAP, SS, SD, worked for Forschungs gemeinschaft	1907–11
					founder of Deutsche Glaubens bewegung (1933–36) ^e			

a. This table demonstrates the Protestant background of German Indology, which since its inception was mainly carried on by men from deeply religious households. Not infrequently, these men were the sons of pastors, driven to the study of Indian text by either evangelical interests or—and not unrelatedly—a personal crisis of faith. With the exception of Albrecht Weber, Hermann Jacobi, and Hermann Oldenberg, who were born in Breslau, Cologne, and Hamburg, respectively, the scholars in this table were all from southwestern Germany. Württemberg Pietism, an austere form of Protestantism with a pronounced proclivity toward millenarianism, played an especially influential role in the formation of Indology.

b. The information listed here has been primarily sourced from Indologist authors, who were often interested in downplaying the religious side of their teachers and/or colleagues. Thus we are still in the dark about many aspects of the religious life or the religious activities of the Indologists. Further researches including more accurate biographies extending beyond the hagiographic accounts we possess at present are an urgent desideratum.

c. Wilhelm Scherer, "Holtzmann, Adolf," in *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, vol. 13 (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1881), 16–18.

d. Rüdiger Schmitt, "Roth, Walther Rudolph von," in *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, vol. 22 (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2005), 109–10; Richard Garbe, "Roth, (Walter) Rudolph (von)," in *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, vol. 53 (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1907), 549–64; Klaus-Günther Wesseling, "ROTH, Rudolf [Walter Rudolph]," *Biographisch-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon*, vol. 24 (Herzberg: Verlag Traugott Bautz, 2005), 1232–42.

- e. Wolfgang Morgenroth, "Albrecht Friedrich Weber - A Pioneer in Indology," *Indologica Taurinensia* 3-4 (1975-76): 321-38 (additional information sourced from McGetchin's book, cited earlier).
- f. Friedrich Wilhelm, "Holtzmann, Adolf," in *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, vol. 9 (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1972), 559-60.
- g. Bernhard Kölver, "Jacobi, Hermann," in *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, vol. 10 (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1974), 228-29 (and see also Sengupta's article "State, University and Indology," cited earlier).
- h. Friedrich Wilhelm, "Oldenberg, Hermann," in *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, vol. 19 (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1999), 507-8.
- i. Helmut Hoffmann, "Garbe, Richard Karl von," in *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, vol. 6 (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1964), 69.
- j. Martin Kraatz, "Otto, Karl Louis Rudolph," in *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, vol. 19 (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1998), 709-11 (the information for Otto is supplemented from Alles and Almond, both cited earlier).
- k. Hans Jürgen Rieckenberg, "Hauer, Jakob Wilhelm," in *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, vol. 8 (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1969), 83-84.
- l. An evangelical Christian movement with roots in Swabian Pietism, the sect goes back to one Johann Michael Hahn (1758-1819), who claimed to have had a religious vision at the age of seventeen. Its members are typically drawn from rural communities scattered across southwestern Germany.
- m. A group that emerged from school Bible-study circles and combined a Protestant youth movement with a hiking culture. The group sought new forms of piety and spiritual renewal, albeit within the Protestant fold.
- n. The successor organization to the Kögenger Bund, the Deutsche Glaubensbewegung sought "folk" forms of worship, officially turned away from Christianity, and began to propagate ideas of Aryan and Nordic religion.

on a selective and flawed reading of European history? This problematic consciousness has been the major theme of this chapter—and indeed this book. As we have traced this history here, we have focused on a number of highly specific parallels that connect Protestant theology to Indology. There are, of course, wider factors at work, but these remain beyond the scope of the present work. It must however be emphasized that the generalized suspicion of tradition has deep roots in contemporary European consciousness. It cannot be eradicated with a few empty gestures toward greater inclusivity or toward a more perspicuous hermeneutic consciousness. Ultimately, the roots of this suspicion will be the very same as the fundamentals of the modern hegemony of self-consciousness, as Schürmann has analyzed these in his *magnum opus*, *Broken Hegemonies*.¹³⁸ The rehabilitation of tradition cannot therefore have a restorative intent. The modern university serves functions that are essentially distinct from those of traditional systems of pedagogy. It would be naïve to assume that a return to tradition is all that is required to correct the deficits of contemporary scholarship. Rather, the rehabilitation of tradition must primarily take the form of a critique and, above all, of a self-critique of modernity. The separation of method from normative, philosophical and historical concerns characteristic of the modern humanities has been one of the more problematic legacies of the nineteenth century. The infiltration of knowledge by power, whether in the guise of theological claims *or* in the guise of secular claims, means that there can be no form of scholarship exempt from critique. Given the ideological potential of science (deriving, paradoxically, from its claimed neutrality), the bar needs to be set especially high when scholars defend their praxis in the name of science. In the next chapter we therefore undertake an evaluation of Indology's claims from the perspective of the philosophy of science.

138. Schürmann, *Broken Hegemonies*, see especially part III “In the Name of Consciousness.”

CHAPTER 5



Problems with the Critical Method

And that is that spiritual source of life from which Christianity, and after the killing of it in Catholicism, true Christian Protestantism has come forth, and with Christianity and Protestantism, the scholarly spirit of the new European culture.

W. M. L. de Wette, *Biblische Dogmatik Alten und Neuen Testaments*

INTRODUCTION

The birth of Indology takes place at the crossroads of two great intellectual currents in German history: Romanticism, which gave rise to the search for pristine civilizations and the interest in myth, and Protestant biblical criticism (and its attendant phenomenon, historicism), which shaped ideas of what texts are and how they were to be studied. But the story of the intellectual roots of Indology cannot be told without also exploring the roots of a third intellectual current of the time: the new *Wissenschaftsideologie* of the nineteenth century. This ideology was to be a potent factor in the development of Indology out of the early grammatical, philosophical, and literary interests of an earlier generation of Orientalists (among them, the Schlegel brothers and the scholar-statesman Wilhelm von Humboldt).

The idea of science or scientificity as embodying academic rigor, an attitude of skepticism (an ideal with strong moral overtones), and the development of a method tailored to the precise needs of the individual field rapidly led to the professionalization and specialization of scholarship. Rather than undertaking broad inquiries into human existence, scholarship came to coalesce around the idea of disciplines or departments. Within Indology, there was consistent growth in the establishment of chairs and concurrent growth in efforts by scholars to distinguish their chairs from those of their colleagues.¹ Yet, it was not Indology, but a related science, classical philology—"our sister

1. See McGetchin, *Indology, Indomania, and Orientalism*, 92–95 for the factors at work in this process. In spite of the fact that certain schools such as Berlin became centers of Indology and exported candidates to the chairs at other universities, McGetchin sees the creation or reinforcement of specializations as one of the main factors responsible for the rapid growth of Sanskrit philology in Germany.

science,” as Oldenberg called it in an essay from 1906²—that came to epitomize the new spirit of science in Germany. It was also the discipline on which the most expectations of making a contribution to humanistic education or *Bildung* were placed.³ It was no surprise, then, that when Indologists sought to legitimate the *wissenschaftliche* character of their discipline, they turned to philology as a prototype, claiming both parallels and descent from it. By underscoring the philological nature of their researches, Indologists hoped to capitalize on the reputation of German scholarship in classical studies (*Altertumswissenschaft*). Although an explicit theoretical justification of Indology’s claim to being a science cannot be found in the writings of the period,⁴ we do find a broad acceptance of positivist philology as being basically synonymous with science in general.

In this chapter, we examine some of the strategies used by Indologists to make the case for their discipline as *Wissenschaft* and how those strategies relate to understandings of science, both historical and contemporary. The chapter is divided into eight sections. The first two sections take a look at how, in the work of Hermann Oldenberg, the leading theoretician of Indology of the day, a new ideal of scientific scholarship on India emerged, and at how this ideal was then grounded in a positivist philology. The next three sections present a brief overview of three scientific currents of the time—positivism, historicism, and empiricism—and show how Indologists were responding to broader movements in philosophy of science, especially the work of Auguste Comte (1798–1857), the intellectual father of positivism and historicism. In the sixth section, we look at criticisms that the positivistic notion of truth has been subject to in the twentieth century; the next section returns the discussion to Kant’s critical project and its historical influence, already broached in the introduction. The eighth and concluding section then presents an overview of Gadamer’s criticisms of the attempt to construe the scientific character of the human sciences along the lines of the natural sciences. Because of the influence of his seminal *Truth and Method* on the contemporary self-understanding of the human sciences, we delve especially deeply into his views. Gadamer’s criticisms of the valorization of method over truth in the humanities and of the Enlightenment’s suspicion of all traditional

2. Hermann Oldenberg, “Indische und klassische Philologie,” 3 and 6.

3. In contrast, Indology was hampered both by its origins in Romanticism and by its association with the cultures of the Orient. Even after Indologists distanced themselves from their Romantic heritage (jettisoning scholars such as the two Holtzmanns—though not their ideas—in the process), they were constantly under pressure to justify their discipline, whose associations with the Orient somehow rendered it suspect. In an address to a congress of German philologists, Oldenberg explicitly acknowledged Indology’s limitations vis-à-vis classical philology. He conceded that “what we study does not enrich our life, or at least not directly and immediately. We cannot offer the great ideals [necessary] for that; as the educator of our youth and our nation, India may never be mentioned in the same breath as Greece and Rome.” Ibid., 8. Yet, Oldenberg nonetheless asserted that Indology had a role to play. Even if the cultures of the East had nothing to teach, “we will nonetheless find,” claimed Oldenberg, “that there is nonetheless a pedagogic element [ein erziehendes Element] in the acquisition of such knowledge.” Ibid., 9. He concludes with a fervent plea that “in view of this” “the educators of our people who draw out of the riches of antiquity [the classical philologists] will not deny us, too, the right to a place alongside them.” Ibid.

4. The one exception is the writings of Hermann Oldenberg, which we discuss below.

forms of authority are the vantage points from which we evaluate Indology's claims to being part of the human sciences.

STEPS TOWARD A SCIENTIFIC INDOLOGY

The development of a new ideal of science at German universities during the nineteenth century has been well documented.⁵ Scholars note that around the late eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries, the term *Wissenschaft* took on grand idealist associations of a system of total and comprehensive knowledge. This system integrated both the transcendental principles of knowledge with the more specialized disciplines that developed from out of these principles and carried forward the work of enabling knowledge of the objective world. In the works of writers such as Fichte (*Wissenschaftslehre*, 1794), Schelling (*Vorlesungen über die Methode des akademischen Studiums*, 1803), Schleiermacher (*Gelegentliche Gedanken über Universitäten in deutschem Sinn*, 1808), and Henrik Steffens (*Vorlesungen über die Idee der Universitäten*, 1809), we find this ideal of science expressed not only in quasi-religious terms, but also closely associated with ideas of national renewal and Germanhood.⁶

These claims, however, were not mere rhetoric. R. Steven Turner estimates that the professoriate expanded in Prussia by 147 percent between 1800 and 1834. Especially striking was the rise in the so-called lower (that is, philosophical) faculty. Berlin's philosophical faculty grew from thirty-two in 1820 to ninety-one by 1848.⁷ Characterizing this rise, Turner writes: "After 1820 the philosophical faculty began to expand phenomenally, largely in response to its new role in the education of Prussia's secondary teachers. It attracted new groups of students, and its teaching body swelled with specialists moving into more and more esoteric areas of philology, history, and the sciences."⁸ There was also a stunning rise in the number of scholarly publications, learned societies, and journals dedicated to new specialized disciplines. It was not

5. See R. Steven Turner, "The Growth of Professorial Research in Prussia, 1818–1848," *Historical Studies in the Physical Sciences* 3 (1971): 137–82 and "The Prussian Universities and the Concept of Research," *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der Deutschen Literatur* 5 (1980): 68–93. Turner has argued that nineteenth-century German attitudes to science should be seen less in terms of their concrete scientific contributions than in terms of the role of what he calls a "*Wissenschaftsideologie*," which played a role in "encouraging intensive professorial research throughout the university." This ideology, again according to Turner, "promoted a lofty, idealistic concept of the universities and also that absolute devotion to learning stereotypical of the German scholar ever since." "The Growth of Professorial Research in Prussia," 153. More recently, Mike Higton (*A Theology of Higher Education* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2012]) has sought to understand the growth in German learning in explicitly theological terms.

6. For a typical example, see F. A. Wolf, "Darstellung der Alterthums-Wissenschaft," in F. A. Wolf's *Darstellung der Alterthumswissenschaft nebst einer Auswahl seiner kleinen Schriften; und litterarischen Zugaben zu dessen Vorlesungen über die Alterthumswissenschaft*, ed. S. W. F. Hoffmann (Leipzig: August Lehnhold, 1834).

7. R. Steven Turner, "The Prussian Universities and the Research Imperative" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1973), 442ff.

8. Turner, "The Growth of Professorial Research in Prussia," 143.

just that there was a sudden burst of intellectual effort, but a change occurred in the very meaning of knowledge, that is, in the notion of what could be studied, what was worth studying, and what counted as knowledge. Turner describes the change in attitudes as follows: "The professor of the eighteenth century had considered his main duty the transmission of established learning to certain professional groups; in addition to maintaining that goal, his nineteenth-century counterparts tried actively to expand learning in many esoteric fields. . . . Research emerged within university ideology as a fundamental duty of the scholar, and a reputation within one's specialist community beyond the university became more and more a *sine qua non* for even minor university appointments."⁹

This ideology of the scholar as engaged in original research was given explicit sanction in the writings of Wilhelm von Humboldt. In his essay "Über die innere und äußere Organisation der höheren wissenschaftlichen Anstalten in Berlin," which was to be a major influence on university reform, Humboldt argued that what was unique about the higher educational faculties was that they regarded *Wissenschaft* as a "never completely solved problem." They therefore "remain ever at research, whereas the school is only concerned with finished and settled insights."¹⁰ If knowledge was no longer a unity, a single science approximating an eternal model as it had been in the time of the ancients, if knowledge had fractured into multiple fields of inquiry, then original research became a duty of the scholar. There were potentially as many forms of knowledge as methods for discovering them. As Paulsen commented in 1901, "The 19th century first introduced the requirement of independent research in science: only he is capable of being a teacher in science, who is himself actively productive in it. And correspondingly, the task of university education is not [the handing down of] mere tradition, but rather, instruction in how to independently bring forth knowledge."¹¹ Among the disciplines (and objects) to be discovered in the nineteenth century, were psychology (man as the intersection and functioning of his psychological capacities), sociology (man as social being), philology (text as document), and biology (life as an organic structure embedded in a specific environment).¹²

Indology, the new science of the study of India, too, emerged in the nineteenth century as part of this general expansion of research into all fields of human activity. It is thus no surprise that it conformed to general ideas of science in the air. Although we do not find an explicit reflection on its status as science (which perhaps would not be undertaken until the early twentieth century), in the writings of the Indologists of the period we do find frequent (and repeated) appeals to the *wissenschaftliche* character of Indology. Certainly, the threshold of positivity (to use Foucault's terminology) was crossed quite early in its history, with the thresholds of epistemologization

9. Ibid., 138.

10. Wilhelm von Humboldt, "Über die innere und äußere Organisation der höheren wissenschaftlichen Anstalten in Berlin," in *Wilhelm von Humboldts Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 10: *Politische Denkschriften*, ed. Bruno Gebhardt (Berlin: B. Behr's Verlag, 1903), 251.

11. Friedrich Paulsen, *Die deutschen Universitäten und das Universitätsstudium* (Berlin: Verlag von A. Asher, 1902), 204–5.

12. See Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002).

and scientificity being crossed a little later. Key in this process of evolution was the idea of Indology as a philological and historical preoccupation with the documents of Indian antiquity, just as the science of classical philology (*Altertumswissenschaft*) was preoccupied with the documents of classical antiquity.

Before the establishment of the first chair for Indology (at Bonn in 1818; the first professor to hold the chair was August Wilhelm Schlegel), German intellectuals had carried out studies into Indian literature from a number of perspectives. Johann Gottfried Herder had produced literary translations of verses of the Bhagavadgītā. Humboldt himself had written an essay on the Gītā, praising it for its philosophical as well as for its poetic qualities.¹³ Schlegel hoped that the discovery of Indian antiquity would provide a similar impetus for the sciences in the nineteenth century as the (re)discovery of classical antiquity had provided in the fifteenth century.¹⁴ He was to be disappointed, however. Initial excitement over Indian thought gave way to a more philological preoccupation with Indian texts. In many ways, this transformation parallels wider currents relating to German philosophy. As Howard remarks, “as the nineteenth-century wore on and under the influence of positivism, the growth of the natural sciences, disciplinary specialization, and the exigencies of industrialization and technology, *Wissenschaft* gradually lost its grand, idealist associations and took on a more limited definition with reference to particular academic fields, empirical rigour, and the putative ideological neutrality of the scholar.”¹⁵ Above all, it was the new disciplines of history and classical philology that were to meet this idea of *Wissenschaft*. Turner notes: “The philological and historical disciplines first displayed the intense concern with research and research training. Only later—during the 1830s—were these commitments widely adopted by science professors, often in direct imitation of learned values and institutional models of the humanistic disciplines.”¹⁶ Indology’s need to establish itself as a science meant that it quickly imbibed these ideas of disciplinary rigour. In fact, its evolution traced that of philology, which always remained *the* science against which it measured itself. Thus, just as the “critical, analytic tendencies of the new philology clashed sharply with the philosophic program of a grand synthesis of learning [and] [a]fter 1830 . . . largely replaced the philosophical tradition,”¹⁷ so, too, did Indology see itself in a conflict with philosophical interpretation. The

13. See “Ueber die unter dem Namen Bhagavad-Gītā bekannte Episode des Mahā-Bhārata I,” 190, n. 1 (the Gītā is “a work rich in philosophical ideas”) and “Ueber die unter dem Namen Bhagavad-Gītā bekannte Episode des Mahā-Bhārata II,” 334 (the Gītā, “more than any other work of this kind, come down to us from any other nation, lives up to the true and genuine concept of a philosophical poem”) and 340 (“philosophical language is already far more developed in this Indian work [the Gītā] than the Greek [language] at least at the time of Parmenides was” and “in every epoch, philosophy had penetrated poetry more deeply in India than [this was the case] in Greece”). (Both works are cited earlier; all citations refer to the 1906 reprint.)

14. Schlegel, *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier*, 111 and see also *ibid.*, 316.

15. Howard, *Protestant Theology*, 29.

16. Turner, “The Growth of Professorial Research in Prussia,” 138.

17. *Ibid.*, 172.

efforts of an earlier generation of scholars such as Herder and Humboldt were dismissed as *Schwärmgeisterei*.¹⁸

By the early twentieth century, we find a widespread consensus in the writings of many Indologists that Indology had to be reestablished along philological principles. Hermann Oldenberg, in an essay written in 1906, argued that Indology was concerned with the documents of Indian antiquity, a task that necessitated a historical and philological approach. With this and other publications on *Indologie* or, as he preferred to call it in explicit contrast to classical philology, on *indische Philologie* (Indian philology), Oldenberg rapidly became the foremost spokesperson for the new science. Between 1875 (the year he published his dissertation, “De sacris fratrum arvalium quaestiones”) and 1920 (the year of his death), he published six articles or speeches devoted to a theoretical clarification of Indology. The earliest of these, “Über Sanskritforschung,” was written in 1886¹⁹; the next to follow was “Die Erforschung der altindischen Religionen im Gesamtzusammenhang der Religionswissenschaft: Ein Vortrag” (1904),²⁰ while the two years 1906–7 saw the publication of three of his most important contributions: “Göttergnade und Menschenkraft in den altindischen Religionen” (1906), Oldenberg’s inaugural lecture on his accession to the rectorship of the University of Kiel²¹; “Indische und klassische Philologie” (1906),²² his most extensive reflection on the relation of Indian philology to classical philology; and “Indologie” (1907),²³ a recapitulation of modern Indology’s tasks that explicitly closed the door on Indology’s Romantic and humanist heritage.²⁴

18. For the politics of this term, see the informative and lively account by Anthony J. La Vopa, “The Philosopher and the *Schwärmer*: On the Career of a German Epithet from Luther to Kant,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 60, no. 1/2, *Enthusiasm and Enlightenment in Europe, 1650–1850* (1997): 85–115.

19. Hermann Oldenberg, “Ueber Sanskritforschung,” *Deutsche Rundschau* 47 (1886): 386–409.

20. Hermann Oldenberg, “Die Erforschung der altindischen Religionen im Gesamtzusammenhang der Religionswissenschaft: Ein Vortrag,” *Deutsche Rundschau* 121 (1904): 248–61, reprinted in Hermann Oldenberg, *Indien und die Religionswissenschaft: Zwei Vorträge von Hermann Oldenberg* (Berlin: J. G. Cotta’sche Buchhandlung Nachfolger, 1906), 1–30. All citations refer to the reprint.

21. Hermann Oldenberg, “Göttergnade und Menschenkraft in den altindischen Religionen, Rede gehalten beim Antritt des Rektorats der Königlichen Christian-Albrechts-Universität, 5. März 1906,” in *Indien und die Religionswissenschaft: Zwei Vorträge von Hermann Oldenberg* (Berlin: J. G. Cotta’sche Buchhandlung Nachfolger, 1906), 31–57.

22. Hermann Oldenberg, “Indische und klassische Philologie,” *Neue Jahrbücher für das klassische Altertum, Geschichte und deutsche Literatur und für Pädagogik* 17 (1906): 1–9.

23. Hermann Oldenberg, “Indologie,” *Internationale Wochenschrift für Wissenschaft, Kunst und Technik* 1 (1907): 635–44.

24. Interspersed between these were two *Jahresberichte* (annual reports) on Indian philosophy (1888 and 1890) written for the journal *Archiv für die Geschichte der Philosophie* (*Archive for the History of Philosophy*) and a similar review of research on Indian religion titled “Indische Religion” published in 1903. Oldenberg’s last such review was the article “Neue indologische Entdeckungen” published in 1918 two years before his death. No other German Indologist, before or since, has published more statements on the theoretical self-understanding of Indology. (See bibliography for complete references.)

What were Oldenberg's main points? In his 1886 text, he was at pains to contrast the more haphazard efforts of British scholars (mainly colonial officers such as William Jones) with the systematic efforts of German scholars. Oldenberg saw the establishment of the Asiatic Society (Calcutta, 1784) as the birth hour of Indology. He credited Wilson, Henry Thomas Colebrooke, and others with establishing this "new branch of historical research." Yet ideas of historical research—however popular—did not suffice to define the scientific character of Indology; rather, what was required was a concerted effort at systematic research. Here, German scholars excelled: "Englishmen began the work; soon it was taken up by men of other nations and in the course of time it transformed itself ever more decisively, to a far greater extent than this could, for example, be said of research into hieroglyphic or cuneiform [writing], into an affair of German science [deutschen Wissenschaft]." ²⁵ "While Colebrooke still stood at the height of his [creative] powers, participation in researches on India began to awaken in that land which had done more than any other to bring these [researches] closer to a strict, firmly grounded science [Wissenschaft]: *Germany*." ²⁶ Oldenberg assigned Germany pride of place in this transition from an amateur preoccupation to a formal *discipline*, the word being used with all its connotations of rigor, dedication, and a structured program of inquiry. Using the two great Sanskrit dictionaries of the time (Monier-Williams and Roth-Böhtlingk) as an example, he typified the contrast between British and German scholarship as follows: "The contrast between the two great periods [of Sanskrit scholarship] could not be more clearly embodied than in these two dictionaries, in which the development of researches on India is displayed: here, the beginnings, which the English science standing directly on the shoulders of Indian pandithood had made; there, the further development, with the methods of strict philology, in terms of breadth and depth pressing incomparably ahead of these beginnings, at their head German researchers." ²⁷

Paralleling the distinction Howard traces between the first and second phases of *Wissenschaftsideologie*, Oldenberg also identified two distinct phases of the reception of Indian thought in Germany. In the first phase, German literature, poetry, and philosophy laid the ground for Indian studies in Germany. As Oldenberg notes, "There could be no more receptive ground for Jones' and Colebrooke's discoveries than the Germany of that period, full of enthusiastic interest for the ancient, folk [volkstümliche] poetry of all nations, filled with great movements in its own literature and philosophy; out of the distance, India's [literature and poetry] now encountered these as though related: so to speak, an Oriental Romanticism and a poetic thought that, in its sweep, sought no less daringly than the absolute philosophy of the Germans to press forward to the formless primordial source of all forms [gestaltlosen Urquell aller Gestaltungen]." ²⁸ Yet, this Romantic heritage could, at times, also be a source of embarrassment, as Oldenberg lets out in his criticisms of Schlegel. Schlegel, he argued, had created a "highly influential fantasy image of India." Yet, this image

25. Oldenberg, "Ueber Sanskritforschung," 386.

26. *Ibid.*, 390 (emphasis in original).

27. *Ibid.*, 402.

28. *Ibid.*, 390.

was neither “sober” nor “faithful” to the truth.²⁹ In contrast, it was “Bopp, with his researches into the grammatical structure of Sanskrit, who undertook to base the science [Wissenschaft] on the long recognized fact of the relationship of this language to Persian and to mainly European languages.”³⁰ Bopp’s approach was more “modest”; yet, it had “penetrated incomparably deeper” into Indian language and literature.³¹ Oldenberg was full of fulsome praise for Bopp’s 1816 work, *Conjugationsystem der Sanskritsprache in Vergleichung mit jenem der griechischen, lateinischen, persischen und germanischen Sprache*, which he considered to have laid the foundation for scientific study of India. He wrote: “We can here only mention with one word the researches that have been carried out since the appearance of this work . . . and for which Bopp laid the foundation at the time. Seldom has more remarkable work been accomplished for science [Wissenschaft] than here.”³²

Bopp’s comparative linguistic approach, however, was only part of the story. The other part, which Oldenberg considered to have divided the evolution of the “science [Wissenschaft] of India” into “two halves,” was the development of historical research, aided above all by a renewed interest in the Veda.³³ Here he identifies three great names: Max Müller, Rudolf von Roth, and Albrecht Weber. Roth, above all, appears to have been a paradigm of this new historical consciousness for Oldenberg. He cites the scholar’s view that it would be a “mockery” if the “criticism and acumen” of a century that had successfully deciphered the rock inscriptions of the Persian kings and Zarathustra’s books, did not also succeed in reading “the history of ideas [Geistesgeschichte] of this people [that is, the Indians] in this mass of writings with certitude.”³⁴ How far did the renewed interest in researching the Veda go toward fulfilling Roth’s expectations? Although Oldenberg conceded that much of what Roth had hoped for could not be attained, he argued that “what has been attained has given a completely new look to the picture, which science [Wissenschaft] had of India.” “This picture appeared to lose itself without a horizon in the misty depths of an unmeasured past; now we find the boundaries; an external starting point for history that can be the subject of our research is within sight. Authentic sources, originating in the oldest period of India, out of which and concerning which historical sources in the customary sense of the term can be attained, opened themselves up and, instead of the twilight traversed by uncertain, shadowy titanic figures, in which the epic poems caused this period to appear, the Veda showed forth a reality that one could hope to understand. . . .” Even where the Veda did not succeed in enabling historical knowledge, this was nonetheless “a gain” because “one then at least knew that the information one sought had vanished and what presented itself as this [information] was now exposed as a fantasy image, one that had emerged from the arbitrariness of later creators of legend.” Scholarship into the Veda, Oldenberg concluded, had succeeded in “outlin[ing] the horizon of historical knowledge with significant forms.”³⁵

29. Ibid., 391.

30. Ibid. (Oldenberg’s emphasis).

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid., 393.

34. Ibid., 394; Oldenberg does not cite the source and we have been unable to discover it.

35. Ibid., 394.

In contrast to the first phase, the second phase of Indian studies in Germany (for which we properly reserve the name *Indology*) was also marked by increasing technization. Whereas the Romantics had been inspired by pedagogic and philosophical considerations, such considerations were regarded as increasingly redundant by career Indologists. As we have seen, following Hegel's review of von Humboldt's *Gītā*, German scholars increasingly came to see Indian texts as raw matter for their own historical and critical researches. Hence Oldenberg could now declare, "it is the task of the philological researcher to determine these fates [which the Indian texts have undergone], so to speak, the life history [Lebensgeschichte] of the texts." He also compared Indian texts, "as they have been handed down to us," with "the paintings of old masters, across which destruction and attempts at restoration, both by legitimate and illegitimate persons, have alternately been at work." Our aim, Oldenberg declared, was to "know, as far as can be recognized, what the painting originally was like."³⁶ Here was where German scholarship came into its own. Oldenberg writes:

We may state [with justification] that the most ambitious efforts [and] the most important successes in this field are associated with the names of German researchers. If we [now] add that it could not easily have been otherwise, then this is not hubris; rather, we thereby merely give expression to a state of affairs that is grounded in the evolution of the science [Wissenschaft] itself. It was natural that the earliest impulses for the nascent research on India, the first attempts to grasp the material that was imposing itself en masse on us and to find preliminary forms for it, are owed to Englishmen—men who had spent a good portion of their lives in India and stood in constant contact with the local scholars of Sanskrit there. But it is no less natural that the honors of further advances [and] deeper insights have fallen to the lot of the Germans. The two areas of science [Wissenschaft], out of which life and strength primarily flowed to researches on India, were and remain essentially German: comparative linguistics [Sprachwissenschaft], which, one can say, was founded by Bopp, and that deepened, powerful science [Wissenschaft] or, just as rightly, art of philology, as it had been practiced by Gottfried Hermann and, alongside him, permeated by the proud spirit of Lessing, Karl Lachmann, full of astute, goal-oriented skill, precise and true [genau und wahrhaftig] in small matters just as much as in big ones.³⁷

Systematicity, rigor, intensification of research, development of autonomous methods, historical reconstruction, and comparative and philological methods—these, then, were the hallmarks of German scholarship on India according to Oldenberg. They were responsible for endowing the study of Sanskrit with its properly scientific character. These traits, however, were not unique to Indology. They were the defining characteristic of German scholarship tout court and in particular of classical philology, which remained *the* science against which Indology measured itself. As Oldenberg clarified, "even if representatives of this philology [that is, of classical philology]...should encounter the youthful science [Wissenschaft] of India

36. Oldenberg, "Ueber Sanskritforschung," 395.

37. Ibid., 400–1.

with reserve or with more than reserve, this changes nothing about the fact that work on Indian texts, investigation into the literary monuments of India, cannot be learnt from any better teacher than those masters, who knew how to improve and to explain the classical texts with an accuracy of method as this world has never seen before.”³⁸ Yet Oldenberg was not simply being ingenious. By the nineteenth century, it was the “new” philology that, above all, had established the reputation of German scholarship. Howard notes that classical philology and its sister discipline, *Alttertumswissenschaft*, became “the German sciences par excellence, and [the] ones with far-reaching ramifications for scholarship and the university system as a whole.”³⁹ Under the stewardship of Johann Matthias Gesner (1691–1761) and Christian Gottlob Heyne (1729–1812), philological studies came to take pride of place within the neohumanist canon of the university. It thus comes as no surprise that Oldenberg sought to construe the *wissenschaftliche* character of Indology along the lines of classical philology. By underscoring the connection between Indology and philology, he hoped to establish the scientific character of Indology. He argued a direct ancestry for Indology in classical philology in that he traced its genealogy via Friedrich Max Müller (1823–1900) to Moriz Haupt (1808–74) and Gottfried Hermann (1772–1848), the latter two classical philologists at Leipzig. Indology was scientific, *wissenschaftlich*, because it had imbibed ideas of methodological rigor and technical precision from philology, from “that... great teacher” as Oldenberg called it in his 1909 article.⁴⁰ Paralleling the development of the study of ancient languages at German universities, which had gone from being ancillary to theological concerns to becoming independent disciplines in their own right,⁴¹ Indian studies in the nineteenth century also underwent a similar process of *Verselbständigung*, rendering themselves independent or autonomous of philosophical, literary, or theological concerns. Well might Oldenberg underscore the *wissenschaftliche* character of Indology, if all that was thereby implied was that it had traced the evolution of philology. And yet that is only half the story, for we must still ask wherein the scientific character of Indology as philology lies. The answer will take us in the direction of a general critique of positivist methodology.

STEPS TOWARD A POSITIVIST PHILOLOGY

Oldenberg further deepened the comparison between Indology and classical philology in later writings. As he expressed it in a 1909 address to a congress of German philologists, it was not just the “existence of material relationships” between the cultures of Greek, Roman, or Christian antiquity on the one hand, and Indian antiquity on the other, that legitimated the comparison between the two. Rather, it was the fact that “from a purely formal perspective, methodologically, the tasks that the

38. *Ibid.*, 401.

39. Howard, *Protestant Theology*, 117.

40. Oldenberg, “Indische und klassische Philologie,” 4.

41. Howard, *Protestant Theology*, 117–20.

Indologist has to solve are in every way comparable to those of the classical philologists, albeit, in other respects, not identical at all.”⁴² Here he distinguished between two aspects: (1) the object and aims of the science; and (2) the method of treating the field. As regards the first, he argued that “for both sciences the task is to summon up the existence of past civilizations [Volkstums] from their grave, to reinvigorate their manifestation, to understand the causal processes at work in them. The doorway here, as there [in classical philology], is language, grammar, and the lexicon.... Then the same holds for the Indologist as for the classical philologist, to hew a trail through monstrous masses of literature, to cleanse the texts, to put the old and the new, as much as possible, in their place.” Indology specifically was faced with the task of a “reconstruction” of “the history of India.”⁴³ Oldenberg, however, conceded that expectations had to be set “especially low” concerning the possibility of a comprehensive and coherent account of the history of India.⁴⁴ In its place, he advocated specialized investigations focusing on “the religious essence of India in its evolution, law, [and] the plastic arts.” Political, economic, or social history remained beyond the ambit of Indology. Instead, Oldenberg argued a narrower claim. Indology was to research “all areas of spiritual activity out of the texts and monuments, just as the classical study of antiquity [klassische Altertumswissenschaft] does it in its own field with such great success.”⁴⁵

This narrowing of focus to what might be called the spiritual history of India (as compared to its material history) was conditioned partly by what Oldenberg called the “existential conditions” under which German scholars operated.⁴⁶ As he noted, “On the one side stood those who work in India locally and on site [an Ort und Stelle], obviously mostly Englishmen, alongside them anglicized Indians: there are administrators, jurists, military officers, practical school-teachers, as a whole not Indologists according to the German mould [nach deutschem Zuschnitt].”⁴⁷ These workers came in for high praise: Oldenberg noted that they had collected manuscripts, inscriptions, works of art, and ethnological and folkloric material. Yet, this work was only preparatory to truly critical scholarship and the latter was done (or was to be done) by German academics. Oldenberg comments: “There are fruits in Indology that only the purposeful [zielbewußt] philological and historical method is capable of picking. To these fruits the hands of the workers, of whom I have spoken, do not always reach.” He continues: “Now the others: we philologists, in particular, the German philologists. Many of us have not seen India at all; for obvious reasons we cannot come so easily to Benares as one comes to Rome or Athens. Thus, we are all too exposed to the danger that something of the ultimate vitality of life is missing from the pictures that appear to us, that what we take to be the cloud trails of the

42. Oldenberg, “Indische und klassische Philologie,” 1.

43. Ibid., 2.

44. Ibid.; his exact words are: “Und dann gilt es die Geschichte Indiens zu rekonstruieren: eine Aufgabe, bei der wir freilich unsere Ansprüche besonders tief herabstimmen müssen.”

45. Ibid.

46. Ibid., 3.

47. Ibid., 3–4.

Indian sky are ultimately only the vapors of our own study-rooms.”⁴⁸ Nonetheless, Oldenberg argued that there was “rich compensation” for these shortcomings:

If we may not feel ourselves immediately certain of [possessing] a feeling for the Indian present, we nonetheless see with greater acuity in the distance of Indian antiquity, that is, in the period that is important, above all, to us. . . . We know the Hindu less well than our [British] colleagues, who live in his land and breathe his air. But to us, I declare, the opportunity has been given to know the Aryan of ancient India better than these [our colleagues].⁴⁹

It is with respect to this task that Oldenberg considered classical philology to be the science par excellence upon which Indology had to model itself. He concluded:

Here I have reached the point at which I was aiming. My task is to speak of the relationship of our science [Wissenschaft] to classical philology. Now if we trust ourselves to be able to look back into those ancient horizons, without constantly going astray in their murky depths, then we owe this above all to *that* philology, the great teacher, from whom we learn to work as philologists!⁵⁰

What made classical philology the paradigmatic science for Oldenberg? Although German successes in classical philology might have partly fuelled these—admittedly somewhat hyperbolic—claims, there is good reason to look more closely at his reasons. Partly hyperbolic as they were, his claims nonetheless expose deep shared commitments (with philology) to certain principles of scholarship.

First and foremost, there were the technical aspects of the discipline. Here Oldenberg argued that there can be “absolutely nothing humiliating for us [i.e., for the Indologists] [to learn from philology] for this is simply a self-evident state of affairs.”⁵¹ As he clarified,

Our science [Wissenschaft] is still too young, still too little established for us to be able to learn and to teach the techniques of the philological art in our own field of work in their complete conformity to law [Gesetzmäßigkeit] and detail. All the experiences, through whose conscious mastery tentative reflection is transformed into a skilled technique of research—we could not possibly have had them ourselves in the necessary richness and determinacy; hence, we must take them over from those who have had these experiences before us. We must observe the possessors of such experiences at work: where can this occur better than in the workshops of Lachmann or Mommsen?⁵²

48. Ibid., 4.

49. Ibid.

50. Ibid. (emphasis in original).

51. Ibid., 4–5.

52. Ibid., 5.

Second, there were the concrete methodological steps to be learned from the philologists. Oldenberg argued that

the art of inquiry that also applies to the Indologist is practiced here [that is, in the workshops of Lachmann and Mommsen]; it is here that he [the Indologist] learns to recognize the seams in the form of what has evolved historically [Gestalt des Gewordenen], through which research penetrates to the processes of becoming [Vorgängen des Werdens] lying behind it [i.e., behind the outward form]; he learns with a confident hand to collect all the firm points and to forget none of them for each and every problem, setting out from which [points] the state of the unknown points, which we are in search of, can be determined. Are there Indologists in training among those whom I address? I do not know of any more suitable advice to give them than to take classes with the teachers of classical philology. They should not slavishly imitate them, but they should learn to apply in other fields and to other conditions what manifests in terms of universal norms in the works of these [teachers] in the most vivid form.⁵³

Third, there were the aims of scholarship, which once again were explicitly borrowed from philology. As Oldenberg exemplified vis-à-vis the *R̥gveda*, Indologists had adapted and further developed the tools of philology for their own needs. The kinds of questions they had raised concerning the text, too, echoed the specific origin of their concepts and methods in philology.

The textual transmission of the *R̥gveda*, already quite firmly established in very ancient times; seemingly in many of the most minute details of an admirable faithfulness: does it nonetheless permit, and if so to what extent, free reign to the conjecture that strives beyond the old state back to the original state [of the text]? [And, further,] the explanation of the *R̥gvedic* text that is laid down in imposing works handed down by the old Indian scholars; does our exegesis have to demonstrate respect before this Indian knowledge [Inderwissen] or must it on its own responsibility hew open its own paths?⁵⁴

Oldenberg also emphasized the critical potential of philology, in both correcting the transmission and in offering an alternative access to the text than the commentarial tradition:

Whoever stands closer to my subject knows how diametrically opposed the views are. What I consider to be correct, I will indicate. . . . It can only appear correct to me to examine the text without all the literal faith in words [Buchstabenglauben] in the traditional text with the methods of classical philology, as precisely as we are able to examine this: then we learn, I declare, to recognize that the exemplary transmission is nonetheless not infallible and in some places we learn to improve it. And similarly,

53. Ibid.

54. Ibid., 5–6.

I can only consider it correct to once again examine the traditional explanation of the Rgveda with the methods of classical philology: we then learn to see through it as completely untenable and in many, I hope in the most places, we learn to find better [explanations].⁵⁵

Although the parallels between Oldenberg's views and Roth's views (discussed earlier in chapter 4) of tradition are striking, we ought not overlook the fact that the new philology, especially as it developed in the hands of scholars such as Heyne and Wolf, was equally skeptical of tradition.⁵⁶ Oldenberg could therefore claim to be well in the mainstream of philological ideas. The new philology, with its critical methods, emphasis on a return to the sources of tradition, disdain for commentarial glosses or interpolations, and preference for literal and historical readings, held out the promise of revolutionizing the understanding of the Veda. It not only offered to build incrementally on existing readings; it was a completely new approach, rooted in completely different expectations and in a completely different understanding of texts. Further, its aims were antithetical to those of the tradition: whereas tradition considered the Veda to be a revelation and a source of infallible knowledge concerning supersensible reality, philology would regard it as a human and historical testament. As Barbara Holdrege notes in her comparison of the Veda and the Torah, the very purpose of studying scripture underwent a sea change.⁵⁷ If the Indologist could not see the antimetaphysical biases of his approach, it was because the new philology implicitly underwrote his antitraditional, antiauthoritarian reflex. Indeed, Oldenberg did not think there was a significant difference between the critical stance espoused by philology and the criticisms of tradition advanced by Indology. As he expressed it, "the technique of interpretation" was "in both fields [i.e., Indology and philology]"

55. Ibid., 6.

56. How far apart the two are to be kept is, of course, a matter of debate, since there are scholars who see the critical reflex of philology as itself partly arising from and partly contributing to theological developments in Germany. According to Howard, the application of "innovative philological techniques to biblical texts" by philologists such as J. D. Michaelis and J. G. Eichhorn laid the foundations for the development of "'myth criticism', the exegetical effort to separate the historical from the mythical in the Bible." Howard therefore argues that one is "tempted" to "generalize that the shape of nineteenth-century German historical criticism of the Bible—and the concomitant critical theology that prioritized historical exegesis over dogma—bears witness to a revolution in philology..." Howard, *Protestant Theology*, 120.

57. "The study of scripture since the nineteenth century has been almost exclusively the domain of biblical and orientalist scholars, who have used the tools of critical analysis in order to determine the cultural, historical, and literary influences that have given rise to individual texts. These historical and literary studies have primarily focused on the *content* of particular religious texts and on questions of *Entstehungsgeschichte*, or the 'history of origins'—the history of causes and conditions that have produced specific texts." Barbara A. Holdrege, *Veda and Torah: Transcending the Textuality of Scripture* (Albany: State University of New York, Press 1996), 3–4. But as Holdrege notes, the "very category of scripture" as it has been conceptualized by Western scholars may be insufficient to these texts. Rather, "the very notion of textuality implicit in the concept needs to be reexamined" since scripture, for the tradition, is "not simply a textual phenomenon, but... [represents] a cosmological principle... inherent in the very structure of reality." Ibid., 4–5.

“partly identical and partly closely related.” “For the scholar of the Veda, who is tempted to translate faithfully according to the Indian commentators, the contact with classical philology is like contact with fresh air. The future of Veda interpretation, this is my conviction, depends not insignificantly upon whether we succeed in dispelling the airs of the commentators’ knowledge by such a fresh breath of air.”⁵⁸

In a nutshell, then, the positivist philology advocated by Oldenberg as the foundation for Indology had the following features:

1. It drew on established methodological canons, made available to it by classical philology.
2. Under the influence of what Sheehan has termed the “documentary impulse” it studied Indian texts as physical, historical, and cultural artifacts, but not, at any event, as literary works.
3. It focused on texts not as they functioned within the life of the community, but as reconstituted by the scholar.
4. It replaced commentary by criticism, where the salient feature of this criticism would be, as Schleiermacher has it, its suspicion.⁵⁹
5. It privileged historical investigations, though, conditioned by the fact that German scholars lacked firsthand access to India, these investigations would not take the form of positive historical research, but of identifying the historical processes at work in the evolution of Indian texts.
6. Finally, there was the claim to being *Wissenschaft*, legitimated not only in terms of specific methodological precepts, but also in terms of a powerful rhetoric of scientificity.

Although presented as making contributions to a positivist, historicist philology, there were significant problems with Oldenberg’s conception of Indology. Oldenberg might recall the names of Gottfried Hermann and Karl Lachmann, but the German Indologists’ knowledge of philology remained tenuous at best. They neither had the secure grasp of language demanded by Hermann nor the secure grasp of critical edition demanded by Lachmann. Their reconstructions of various Ur-texts of the Mahābhārata and Bhagavadgītā (studied in the preceding chapters) were evidence that they had not grasped the basic principles of textual criticism. For the most part, their philology could be summed up as what Heyne once described as “the vanity of wanting to seem brilliant through emendations.”⁶⁰ Further, their penchant for studying the Veda from a documentary perspective needs to be seen in its historical context. Although Indologists did introduce new modes of contemplation, those modes in the final analysis are also not free from suspicion. It is perhaps true that the

58. Oldenberg, “Indische und klassische Philologie,” 6.

59. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutik und Kritik. Mit einem Anhang sprachphilosophischer Texte Schleiermachers*, ed. Manfred Frank (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1977), 255–56.

60. As reported by Hermann Sauppe in “Johann Matthias Gesner und Christian Gottlob Heyne,” in *Göttinger Professoren. Ein Beitrag zur deutschen Cultur und Literaturgeschichte in acht Vorträgen* (Gotha: Friedrich Andreas Porthes, 1872), 89.

tradition did not develop historical modes of contemplation (or, at least, not to the same extent and in the same way as modern scholarship). As Oldenberg exclaimed, "historical development tends to be more weakly, more nebulously formed in India than in the West. And it lies in a transmission before us that does everything [possible] in order to obscure its image completely: this transmission without firm dates, which often confuses old and new to a seemingly hopeless extent, which continuously presents us with illusions with the pretentious [anspruchsvoll] wisdom of its masses of commentaries that only owe their existence to the sophistry of the scholastics in place of genuine thoughts and institutions."⁶¹ Oldenberg also wrote that, "the more we . . . know of the history of India," the more it appeared "as an incoherent rise and fall of accidental events." "These events lack a secure hold and the meaningful sense such as that the power of a national spirit [Volksgeistes] that wills and transforms its will into deeds lends history [Geschehen]." "Only in the history of ideas, above all of religious thought," do we find "firm ground." "One may hardly speak of history in another sense here . . . [and] a people that has no history, naturally has even less of historiography."⁶²

These claims of a deficient historical consciousness among Indians were, doubtless, at least partly rhetorical. By highlighting the historicist dimensions of their research, Western Orientalists could make a powerful case for their own profession. Yet, what emerged at the end of this process of divestment of the text of its traditional social contexts and meanings was not a text emptied of all religious authority, but one whose authority had, to use Sheehan's terms, been reconstructed and recuperated elsewhere: in the academies of Western scholars.

Sheehan demonstrates in painstaking detail how changes in attitudes to the Bible in the eighteenth century led to the development of "nonliterary techniques . . . for evaluating documents."⁶³ Once the Bible lost its source of legitimation in a single, unified church, scholars began to undertake the "recuperation of a text whose authenticity and authority could no longer be guaranteed by . . . theology."⁶⁴ In this project, scholars turned to various domains and disciplines, especially philology. The Bible came to be seen as a document rather than as a carrier of theological truths. As Sheehan describes the process, the "idea of the textual unconscious was key to the documentary impulse. By divorcing the physical features of the manuscript from its literary content, and by using these physical features to historicize the manuscript, both Maubillon and Montfaucon successfully removed the question of literary content from the domain of serious scholarship."⁶⁵ Yet, while these methodological innovations were essential to the discovery of the academic Bible, they were also conditioned by this discovery, indeed, made *possible and necessary* by it. The cultural Bible became the legitimation for a positivist philology that was, in turn, tasked with the investigation of this very text qua cultural artifact. "As a tool for teaching, a subject of

61. Oldenberg, "Indische und klassische Philologie," 6.

62. Oldenberg, "Ueber Sanskritforschung," 406.

63. Jonathan Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 102.

64. Ibid., 213.

65. Ibid., 103.

scholarly research, and a disseminated document, the authority and authenticity of the Bible were guaranteed—in these domains—by the exercise of philological scholarship.”⁶⁶ Hence, for Sheehan, the central problem for a study of the Enlightenment Bible (and its attendant methods) cannot, following a popular narrative, be that of an overcoming and an emancipation of religious authority, but its “reconstruction and recuperation.”⁶⁷

Western scholarship on Indian scriptural literature would trace a similar trajectory, first projecting and then deconstructing the category of scripture. The radically reconstituted texts that emerged at the end of this process were mere simulacra of their originals. Legaspi has elegantly defined “scripture” as a text that “functions in an authoritative and obligatory way within the context of a community shaped by a coherent economy of meaning.”⁶⁸ If we accept his definition, we can see why the Orientalists’ attempt at projecting an autonomous study of Indian texts was destined to fail. On the one hand, the Orientalists claimed justification for their work in the fact that they were offering a nonconfessional take on Indian texts. On the other, the texts studied by them had lost all reference to their originating communities. They were no longer the texts they had originally been. The “knowledge” the Orientalists attained in this process was thus pertinent only for them, premised on objects that existed only for them. Yet, before we set aside the work of the Indologists, it is useful and illuminating to consider exactly what kind of knowledge it was that was attained in Indology and what the epistemic foundations of this knowledge were. These questions will lead us ineluctably into a wider question concerning the understanding of scientific method in the nineteenth century.

CONSTRUING THE (NATURAL) SCIENTIFIC CHARACTER OF PHILOLOGY

Oldenberg in his essay pursued two aims. The first was to legitimate the claims of his discipline to being a form of knowledge, *Wissenschaft*, alongside and on par with classical philology. The second was to ground the claim to being scientific, *wissenschaftlich*, in an ideal of method. We shall distinguish between these two as the claim to science (or *Wissenschaftsanspruch*) and the claim to scientificity (or *Wissenschaftlichkeitsanspruch*). The former refers to the social and pragmatic aspects of the acceptance and integration of Indology into the university canon; the latter refers to the epistemic aspects of how the university canon in general was understood such that Indology could claim to belong to it. The former aspect has been studied in great detail elsewhere, among others by McGetchin, Sengupta, and Rabault-Feuerhahn, and we shall therefore not pursue it further here. Rather, we shall focus on the second aspect, attempting what might be called a *Wissenschaftlichkeitsgeschichte* rather

66. *Ibid.*, 117.

67. *Ibid.*, xii.

68. Michael C. Legaspi, *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 14.

than a *Wissenschaftsgeschichte* of Indology here. The question we shall pursue is: on *what* understanding of science can Indology claim to be *Wissenschaft*?

The search for an answer to this question takes us back to the problem of method in what have been called the human sciences, the so-called *Geisteswissenschaften*.⁶⁹ Although Oldenberg did not explicitly clarify wherein the scientific character of philology lay, it is not hard to trace the roots of his understanding of science. The supposedly scientific character of his philology was, in essence, unwritten by three implicit claims: (1) its positivism; (2) its historicism; and (3) its empiricism. The insistence on the positive character of philology was not surprising, given the history of effect of the positivism of Auguste Comte, which largely shaped nineteenth-century attitudes and ideas of science. Positivism was the reigning intellectual current of the nineteenth century. Emerging originally as a theory of experience, Comtean positivism influenced the fields of economics, politics, and even engendered the field of scientific sociology. Besides J. S. Mill, many leading intellectuals at the time made common cause with positivism. "Alexander Bain, John Morley, George Henry Lewes, George Eliot and Harriet Martineau were partial adherents of Comte's positivist system; others (e.g. Matthew Arnold, Henry Sidgwick and Leslie Stephen) read Comte—often surprisingly sympathetically—because, given their particular moral concerns, he was a force to be reckoned with. From the mid-1850s there was an official positivist movement, led by Richard Congreve, and including E. S. Beesly, J. H. Bridges and the prolific Frederic Harrison."⁷⁰ Beyond this list of luminaries, positivism was to have wideranging effects in the three major European powers of the nineteenth century: England, France, and Germany. Even though the form of positivism that finally established itself in these countries was different in each case, nineteenth-century Europe can rightly be regarded as the greatest flowering of positivism at any time in human history.⁷¹ Owen Chadwick nicely sums up the lasting influence of Comte,

69. The term *Geisteswissenschaften* was popularized by the translator of J. S. Mill's *Logic*, who used the term to render Mill's "moral sciences." More recently, it has been standard practice to translate *Geisteswissenschaften* (back) into English as "human sciences." Schürmann follows Gadamer (and in this both diverge from contemporary academic practice) in that he translates *Geisteswissenschaften* as "social sciences." For reasons of fidelity, we retain his "social sciences" wherever we quote from him, although, in our own text, we prefer "human sciences" (the one exception to this rule is the expression "social scientist"; the alternative "human scientist" sounds awkward and contrived, reflecting our deep-seated unease with calling the student of the human sciences a "scientist").

70. Cheryl B. Welch, "Social science from the French Revolution to positivism," in *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth Century Political Thought*, ed. Gareth Stedman Jones and Gregory Claeys (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 189.

71. As Rom Harré writes, citing an unnamed commentator, "the impressive 'rise of science' in the public regard in this period (one commentator remarked that the locomotive was all that was needed to convince the general public of the authority of physical science) ensured that the influence of [positivist] authors like Comte, Darwin, Huxley, Mach, and Spencer was very widespread, filtering through to moral, political, and economic attitudes to life itself." Rom Harré, "Positivist thought in the nineteenth century," in *The Cambridge History of Philosophy 1870–1945*, ed. Thomas Baldwin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 26.

when he writes: "In the mind of every one of us, even the most devout of us, is tucked away some little secret piece of Comte."⁷²

Oldenberg's (re)framing of the scientific character of philology in terms of positivism can thus be understood in terms of a general but paradigmatic intellectual constellation of the time. Let us see what led him to this understanding of philology.

The story of philology more or less follows the vicissitudes of the human sciences in their complex and problematic distinction from the natural sciences. Thus, in order to understand the identification of positivism with science tout court at this moment in European history, we should first look at how the human sciences, headed by philosophy, split off from the natural sciences, and then at how the human sciences attempted to ground their methods in a torturous relationship with natural sciences: the human sciences were both distinct from the natural sciences and *like* them. To anticipate, the three ways in which the human sciences attempted to distinguish themselves are: (1) positivism, (2) historical and/or dialectical, and (3) phenomenological-hermeneutic.

In antiquity, there existed no separation between philosophy and science.⁷³ Take, for example, the earliest Greek philosophers, the so-called Presocratics. Their works, which the later doxographers uniformly titled *Peri Phuseōs* or "On Nature," contained both cosmologies and ethical discussions. Plato's *Timaeus* likewise contained serious discussions about mathematics, the universe, space, and physiology, alongside a theology that the entire Christian tradition of the Middle Ages found meaningful. Aristotle is even more explicitly an illustration of the unified intellectual enterprise whereby philosophy works hand in hand with scientific enquiry. Not only does he lecture on physics, politics, biology, the soul, God, and friendship but he also clarifies the common metaphysical grounding of all these subjects, which he articulates in his study of the first principles or the *archai*.

In sharp contrast to this approach, modernity defines itself by rapidly setting apart philosophy (and its branches, anachronistically called the "human sciences") and the natural sciences. Indeed, we could even make an argument for seeing the preliminary gesture for this division in the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas, who distinguished between *lumen naturale* and *lumen revelans* or "the light of natural reason" and "the light of revelation." The four-faculty structure of the medieval university, encompassing, besides law and medicine, the theological faculty and the philosophical faculty (or what we today might call "arts and sciences") can at least partly be

72. Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century*, 233.

73. The following sections draw heavily on the unpublished lecture notes of Reiner Schürmann, professor of philosophy at the Graduate Faculty of the New School for Social Research and the leading European intellectual to theorize the origins of totalitarianism after Arendt. Schürmann belonged to a tradition of European humanism that is the absolute opposite of the tradition of European exceptionalism, of which German Indology is a part, and his work provides the best vantage from which to interrogate Indology's claims to being a European tradition of knowledge. We therefore draw extensively on the unpublished text of Schürmann's "Methodology of the Social Sciences," a lecture course offered in 1982 at the New School for Social Research.

traced back to the influence of this division. The philosophical faculty (which taught subjects such as arithmetic, geometry, logic, grammar, and rhetoric) was explicitly considered a lower (i.e., preparatory) faculty. One could further speculate, with much convincing evidence, that this distinction itself is theological in its innermost nature: Christian belief begins by separating belief and reason, assigning theology to the former. This precarious relationship between the sciences and philosophy is clear in the case of Descartes in the seventeenth century. Descartes is both a scientist and philosopher; he is quite at home in theorizing about optics, geometry, and the circulatory system of blood. And yet, in his *Meditations*, God is introduced to guarantee the reality of the perceived world. This is also the case in Leibniz; his *Monadology* does double duty as both a sort of atomic theory and a theology. But this tenuous relationship between philosophy and science, already distinct, does not last. Schürmann notes:

Then progressively a shift occurs which is more than a distribution of labor: the scientist doing research and the philosopher attempting to ground scientific discourse in the structure of the knowing subject (Kant takes Newtonian physics for granted and places it on a critical basis).

In the 19th century, the estrangement between science and philosophy is blatant: for the scientist, 'true' is what is empirically verifiable; and Hegel's and Schelling's philosophical systems now appear as frightfully unscientific. Philosophers build their concepts around such terms as 'spirit', 'absolute' etc.—before which the scientist can only shrug. The divorce is complete. It still marks the cultural situation today. It is responsible for the sometimes desperate attempts at 'bridging the gap'. In fact, there exist two cultures: the scientific one and the 'meta'-culture.⁷⁴

To complicate the picture, there is a further distinction between philosophy and the human sciences. Whereas the rift between philosophy and natural sciences has been a continuous process, beginning already at the end of antiquity, the social sciences have a much more complicated relationship to the natural sciences. It is very important to understand this distinction, because we now see philologists, with no training in philosophy, who feel quite competent to assess difficult philosophical texts of antiquity. Wherefrom their conviction of competence? In a certain sense, the subjectivity of the social scientist, founded in his method, provides an "all-encompassing method" that becomes the bedrock of human sciences. But matters are not so simple, because in the human sciences "the researcher himself is always implied in what he studies."⁷⁵ According to Schürmann, the "divorce between science and philosophy"

74. Reiner Schürmann, "Methodology of the Social Sciences," typewritten lecture notes, Reiner Schürmann Papers, The New School Archives and Special Collections, Fogelman Social Sciences & Humanities Library, 1–2. (Hereafter cited as Schürmann, "Methodology of the Social Sciences"; page numbers refer to the pagination of the original typescript in the collection of the New School Archives.)

75. *Ibid.*, 2.

that occurs in the nineteenth century can be traced back to this fact.⁷⁶ The scientist now “turns away” from what is “immediately given” and “constitutes a ‘world’ of research.”⁷⁷ This world, obviously, does not replicate the world the scientist inhabits, even though it comprises the tools (for example, hypotheses and models) he uses to understand and interpret his world. This solution, of course, is not available to philosophy or the human sciences, for they cannot claim to constitute a “pure” world of research, as the natural sciences can. Their models must have a relation to reality; that is, they must themselves contain some element of the real.

We can now understand the naïveté and futility implicit in Oldenberg’s (and other Indologists’) claim that their hypothetical and reconstituted texts are the real ones. Having attempted to construe the scientific character of their discipline on the model of the natural sciences, they were caught on the horns of a dilemma: they can neither acknowledge the texts of the tradition as the authentic ones (in which case the Indologists’ task is reduced to exegesis, that is, carrying forward the commentarial tradition) nor can they acknowledge the constructed character of their own texts (in which case they are talking about literally nothing). As much as they would like to think of themselves as (natural) scientists, the notion of purely theoretical (i.e., unapplied) research available in the natural sciences was unavailable to them. Hence, they had only one way out: to maintain the model-character of their reconstructions but insist that their models contain *more* of reality than the originals.⁷⁸ Ontologically, the tradition now appears deficient in comparison to its image, while ethically-epistemologically the popular reception appears naïve (“uncritical”) in comparison with the critics’ understanding.

The point is worth underscoring. Whereas the natural sciences speak of a world that is epistemologically and theoretically separated from the world the scientist inhabits, the social scientist is “both embedded in a social context” and has to “reconstitute it [i.e., his society] theoretically.” “More than the natural sciences, the human sciences aim at practice—at practical ‘application.’”⁷⁹ This practical part is essential to their constitution, but it provokes a question: in what sense can the human sciences be considered *sciences* when this term primarily refers to the disinterested theoretical contemplation characteristic of the natural sciences? As Schürmann notes, “There is no problem with a seminar of ‘methodology in natural sciences’: that would be the inquiry into ways of producing that world of models. But there is a problem with regard to ‘social’ sciences because the ‘ways’ are directed less towards abstract knowledge than back towards social reality, towards intervention... ‘critique,’ first of all. Eventually, a transformation of the society in which we live.”⁸⁰ Here arises the

76. Ibid.; Schürmann is using the term “philosophy” in a wide sense that includes the social sciences.

77. Ibid.

78. This is not an empty statement. As we saw, this claim was explicitly made by Adolf Holtzmann Sr., at the very inception of German Mahābhārata studies. As he put it, “The Kuruṅge are thus not a translation [of the Indian characters]; I may say: they are my work. But nonetheless they are Indian through and through and do not contain anything, even in the slightest detail, for which I could not demonstrate [the existence of] an Indian prototype.” Holtzmann Sr. *Indische Sagen*, x.

79. Schürmann, “Methodology of the Social Sciences,” 2.

80. Ibid.

definitive aspect of the social scientist's work. It is now *critical* not only in the weak sense that compared with the tradition the scientist appears to undertake a reflection (mediated via his theoretical model) on his object but also in the stronger sense that it has an ethical-social dimension. The scientist must not only create the models that reflect reality but also *clarify* reality back to the layperson. Practically, this took the form of Indologists trying to teach Indians how to read their own texts "critically."

Hence the twin protestations of the Indologists: "we are scientific" and "we are useful." A true scientist need assert neither. One does not read a journal of physics where one reads, "We are scientific!" This obsessive cry of the Indologists we have so far seen is symptomatic of the intense anxiety of the social scientist. The anxiety stems from the unavailability of the hypothetical-deductive, experimentally verifiable method in the human sciences. Thus, having adopted natural scientific method as the prototype of true knowledge, the human sciences are caught in the bind of having to continuously justify themselves vis-à-vis (natural) science. By claiming that philology is a rigorous science, philology ultimately places itself on a dangerous and doomed ground, for it will be unable to live up to the criterion of scientificity implicit in the natural sciences. To trace the history of attempts to legitimate the scientific character of philology is simultaneously to trace the history of the travails of the idea of "method" in the human sciences. Let us see how the human sciences have attempted to create their own alternative method.

What is it that makes the transference of the (natural) scientific ideal into the domain of human sciences questionable? The natural scientist, when speaking of theoretical objects, makes use of concepts or terms (e.g., mass, energy) derived from the world he inhabits. However, he is able to draw a strict line between the natural scientific usage of such terms (e.g., in formulae or experiments) from their everyday meanings. In the human sciences, no such division is available. As Schürmann notes, the admixture of what is scientific and not scientific is "essentially constitutive of the domain of any discourse about society."⁸¹ In spite of attempts by social scientists to produce formal systems analogous to those of the scientists (e.g., the search for metalanguages in analytic philosophy, Russell's theory of types), these attempts remain illusory. These systems cannot be used to predict or evaluate the outcome of experiments as in the natural sciences (e.g., the formula $E = mc^2$, which, provided one of the two variables is known, will always yield the second). Further, the discovery of the idea of universal history in Kant (more specifically, the discovery of the historicity of all existence that occurs in Droysen and is raised to a methodological principle in Dilthey) makes it impossible henceforth for the social sciences to construe their objects naïvely on the model of the natural sciences. Schürmann attributes the break between the "two cultures... the scientific and the 'meta'-culture"⁸² directly to this discovery. Whereas the "scientific modern mind" renounces the claim that "theory corresponds to invariable objective structures in the world [and] constitutes... a discursive world, [one] made of models," the

81. Ibid.

82. Ibid.

“critical mind” cannot renounce “the relatedness to a given world altogether.” “There is no ‘pure’ object of social sciences, but only an ‘historical’ one.”⁸³

Thus we now turn to “historical grounding” of method. To understand the crisis brought about by the discovery of history for the human sciences, we need to take a closer look at Comte. The tension between the natural and human sciences is already present in Comte’s early work, his famous *Cours de philosophie positive* (six volumes, 1834–42). Volumes one through three of this work analyze the natural sciences: mathematics, astronomy, physics, chemistry, and biology. In his final three volumes, Comte then deals with the social sciences, self-consciously laying the grounds for a new science. This work presupposes the “Law of the Three Stages of Humanity,” which can be summarized as follows: humanity develops via three successive stages, namely, the theological, the metaphysical, and the positive. In the first, the human mind seeks to understand phenomena in terms of supernatural causes or reasons; in the second, it moves on to seeking abstract causes or reasons. Comte emphasizes that the metaphysical stage is but a transition in the development of science from a theological to a positivist inquiry. Thus, only in the third, properly scientific phase does the mind turn away from seeking first causes or origins and toward identifying the law underlying phenomena. Paralleling this theory of the genesis of the natural sciences, Comte also offers an account of the material development of society: first militaristic, then legalistic, and finally culminating in industrialism.

This law, as can be plainly seen when stated bluntly, is hardly a law in the scientific sense. It gains its validity not by being either logically true or through empirical verification, but through its application. The social scientists, especially the philologists, rest their claims regarding the scientificity of their method on the ambiguity of this law. A reading of Mahābhārata studies, as the German Indologists have undertaken them, reveals that Comte has been thoroughly absorbed into this discipline, to the point where most Indologists do not even realize that they are Comteans! Note the correspondence of Comte’s Law and the textual history offered by Indology for the Mahābhārata: the epic’s textual history is divided up into three phases: an initial militaristic phase; followed by a second phase in which scheming, power-hungry Brahmins (Comte’s lawyers and jurists?) interpolated “abstract” ideas into the text, corrupting it; and finally, a positive phase, marked by a critical approach, which German philology must fulfill. The critical approach “stops looking for causes of phenomena, and limits itself strictly to laws governing them; likewise, absolute notions are replaced by relative ones.”⁸⁴ Comte’s hypothetical law has become the absolute law that grants scientificity to Indology. It proceeds through an analysis of layers and identification of interpolations and a tireless capacity for detheologization and excision of metaphysics.

Let us now return to the third, positive stage. Comte’s sole legacy here appears to be skepticism. If this were scientific skepticism, Indologists would be open to

83. Ibid., 3.

84. Michel Bourdeau, “Auguste Comte,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2011 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta; <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2011/entries/comte/>.

questioning the validity of their method; they would be able to adopt new approaches and engage in dialogue with other forms of inquiry. But this is not so. Comte's inheritance is complex. The law brooks no suspicions; Comte endows the final positive stage with its own form of dogmatism. The only difference between an earlier theological dogmatism and the new dogmatism is the law of human development. Indologists are no skeptics, for they believe in the scientific status of Comte's hypothesis, which allows them to continue in their positivistic praxis. Comte clarifies the necessary dogmatism in his second major work. As Bourdeau writes:

The *Considerations on Spiritual Power* that followed some months later presents dogmatism as the normal state of the human mind. It is not difficult to find behind that statement, which may seem outrageous to us, the anti-Cartesianism that Comte shares with Peirce and that brings their philosophies closer to one another. As the mind spontaneously stays with what seems true to it, the irritation of doubt ceases when belief is fixed;⁸⁵ what is in need of justification, one might say, is not the belief but the doubt. Thus the concept of positive faith is brought out, that is to say, the necessity of a social theory of belief and its correlate, the logical theory of authority.⁸⁶

If Comte's silencing of the critical impulse in the third, positive stage does not surprise us, it is because we have so thoroughly internalized the narrative of the apotheosis of criticism in the Enlightenment that we no longer consider it necessary to query whence comes the authority of the modern scholar. At the same time as German scholars railed against the machinations of a corrupt elite (the Brahmins), they entrenched themselves as beneficiaries of an arcane method. As official purveyors of Indian culture to the European public, they managed to insert themselves between the text and the reader. The university offered them a powerful bully pulpit from which to harangue theologians and philosophers, the previous occupants of the power echelon the philologists in the third and positive stage of human development wished to occupy. And yet, there is more to the story of positivism. For, as Bourdeau notes, Comte himself underwent a kind of turn after 1846:

After Clotilde's death in 1846, positivism was transformed into "complete positivism," which is "continuous dominance of the heart" (*la prépondérance continue du coeur*). "We tire of thinking and even of acting; we never tire of loving," as the dedication to the *System* put it. Positivism transformed science into philosophy; complete positivism now transforms philosophy into religion.... The transformation of philosophy into religion does not yield a religion of science because, having

85. This "fixed belief" dogmatism of positivism coincides with Luther's distinction between the *sozomenoi* and *apollumenoi*, or the saved and the damned. For details on the link between textual deconstruction and Lutheranism, see Vishwa Adluri, "A Theological Deconstruction of Metaphysics: Heidegger, Luther, and Aristotle," *Epoché* 18, no. 1 (2013): 129–60. That a criticism of the previous stages, that is, metaphysics and theology, also works hand in glove with Luther's project hardly needs to be proved.

86. Bourdeau, "Auguste Comte."

overcome modern prejudices, Comte now unhesitatingly ranks art above science. . . . the break-up with the academic world was complete. . . .!⁸⁷

German Indology did not follow Comte down this path. It accepted a popular (and clichéd) view of positivism (even making it the basis of its “scientific” praxis⁸⁸), but it did not think through positivism to its end, as Comte had. As was remarked earlier in the introduction, the positivism it subscribed to was an incomplete positivism: it took the turn neither to a positivism dominated by social, emancipatory, and aesthetic concerns, as in Comte, nor to a critical positivism dominated by the rejection of a reality independent of the model-character of science, as in Mach, nor to logical positivism dominated by the verification principle, as in Carnap. Yet, the attempt at holding out in the third, positive stage was no solution, for Indology thereby rendered itself irrelevant to and out-of-step with wider currents in European philosophy.

87. Ibid.

88. Positivism remains the basis of the Indologists’ scientific praxis, even when—as is the case in Bronkhorst’s recent article—they argue against it. Indeed, the explicit target of Bronkhorst’s criticism is not so much “methodological positivism,” but rather the reliance upon positive data in the form of texts. In his assessment, this reliance skews the results of the Indologists, because they are now—allegedly—forced to accept the dominant perspective of the Brahmins (in his opinion, the “winners” who were able to ensure that only their version of events or their ideas survived). The following passage is typical of his concerns: “The winner takes all. The texts that have survived are the ones that belong, or were acceptable, to the currents of thought that have been victorious in the long run, for whatever reason. If, as philologists, we decide to limit our attention to the texts that have survived, we take the side of the victors, perhaps unwittingly. Worse, by doing so we run the risk of taking the side of the victorious tradition, which includes projecting back its vision of the past.” Johannes Bronkhorst, “Against Methodological Positivism in Textual Studies,” *Asiatische Studien* LXIV, no. 2 (2010): 267 (italics in original). Bronkhorst further argues that Indologists ought to, in the name of “a more critical spirit,” move beyond the surviving texts and seek the outlines of those traditions whose texts have not survived (specifically of the Buddhists, the Ājivikas, and the Cārvākas, the “losers” in his idiom). Ibid., 269. Thus, even though the article is titled “Against Methodological Positivism in Textual Studies,” what Bronkhorst is really opposed to is not methodological positivism as such but scholars’ practice of deferring to the extant texts instead of positing their own texts. Thus, his approach is still methodological positivism, albeit a positivism where the positum, the text, must first be posited rather than being accepted in the form in which it is given. (A more appropriate title for the article would thus have been: “Against Textual Studies in Methodological Positivism.”) Bronkhorst’s argument fails because he does not grasp the distinction between positivism as an approach and as a reliance on positive data. Indeed, his prescription is no more than the formalization of something Indologists had been doing any way for over a century: they had progressively been freeing themselves from the text since at least Roth’s time (and for similar sorts of reasons, namely to recover an alternative history of India in which Brahmanic ideas do not become normative for Indian tradition). Once again, the root anxiety behind this explicit call to Indologists to distance themselves from the texts (and to seek the hidden texts of other sects) is the fear that, if they rely upon the texts that have become normative for the Indian tradition, they will “fall in [sic] the trap to become, in Indian studies, second rate imitation pandits. . . .” Hence Bronkhorst’s conclusion that Indologists “have to think twice before [they] decide to limit [their] attention to texts that have survived.” Ibid., 268. Exactly how the Buddhists, Ājivikas, or Cārvākas are helped by conjuring up texts Bronkhorst does not explain.

Indeed, it led to an irreparable crack in the very foundation of the human sciences in particular and the Enlightenment in general. On the one hand, we have a critical science coeval with “outrageous” dogmatism; a purportedly universal humanism surrendering to the narrow hegemonic claim that European self-understanding represents the fulfillment of planetary human development; and a science that brooks no criticism. On the other hand, we have the universality of the natural sciences and its powerful integration of all humans across the world through technology. It is easy to see which element of this contradiction—German Indology as a human science or natural science as the feature of all humanity—won out in the end.

The attempt to construe the scientific character of philology on analogy with that of the natural sciences thus fails. Positivism is no guarantee of the scientificity of Indology. But what of the second of Oldenberg’s three candidates, historicism? Can it ground the scientific character of Indology?

HISTORICISM AND THE SEDUCTIONS OF POSITIVE SOCIOLOGY

Indology appears to be on more stable ground with the second of the three aspects we noted earlier as underwriting the scientific character of philology: historicism. Here it seems we can at last point to real contributions made by Indologists to the study of Indian texts. Even though the absence of historical consciousness was never as pronounced a feature of ancient cultures as is sometimes made out to be by proponents of the theory, it is undeniable that a proliferation of historical knowledge took place after the nineteenth century. To cite but the best known examples of this expansion, there was Lassen’s four-volume *Indische Alterthumskunde* completed between 1843 and 1862 and Weber’s three-volume *Indische Streifen* (a collection of smaller articles that had appeared elsewhere and were, as he wrote in his preface to the first volume, “wanderings over the wide, almost unsurveyable fields of Indian cultural history [Cultur-Geschichte]”) published between 1868 and 1879.⁸⁹ Some of the most significant contributions to this proliferation took the form of canonical histories of Indian literature and philosophy. Besides Winternitz’ three-volume *Geschichte der indischen Literatur*, other representatives of this genre include Windisch’s *Geschichte der Sanskrit-Philologie und Indischen Altertumskunde* (both cited in the introduction), Glasenapp’s *Die Literaturen Indiens. Von ihren Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*, and Frauwallner’s *Geschichte der indischen Philosophie*.⁹⁰ Doubtless some of this added to our knowledge of Indian history, although, equally doubtless, most of it, such as Lassen’s pseudo-ethnographic researches or Frauwallner’s periodization of Indian history into an “Āryan” and an “Indian” intellectual phase, made no contribution outside the respective author’s head.

89. Albrecht Weber, *Indische Streifen*, vols. 1–3 (Berlin: Nicolaische Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1868–79).

90. Helmuth von Glasenapp, *Die Literaturen Indiens. Von ihren Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (Wildpark-Potsdam: Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft Athenaion, 1929). For the Frauwallner citation, see chapter 1.

Yet at stake here is not history as such, but the historicism of the Indologists, specifically, vis-à-vis its claim to embodying greater scientificity. And this means, once again, that we need to trace this phenomenon back to its historical origins. Although many candidates have been proposed for the title of “father of historicism” (among them Vico, Leopold von Ranke, J. G. Droysen, and Wilhelm Dilthey), historicism as a philosophical theory, like positivism, originates in the work of Comte. In contrast to Ranke and Droysen, who emphasized the historically unique character of events and therefore rejected grand philosophical narratives of history in favor of an objective and descriptive science of history (*Geschichtswissenschaft*), Comte specifically sought a law of historical development that would explain all of human history. (Ranke and Droysen, for this reason, are more properly considered the founders of the historiographical movement known as “historism”; the tendency among English speakers to use “historicism” and “historism” interchangeably is responsible for much of the confusion.⁹¹) Comte therefore is the true father of historicism, understood as “the belief that objective laws can either be derived from history or imposed upon history.”⁹²

Comte’s influence on Dilthey is well attested.⁹³ But although Dilthey developed his project of grounding the human sciences in dialogue with Comte’s thought, he explicitly rejected the latter’s metaphysics. In a letter from 1882, he stated that his project was undertaken via a rejection of Comte’s positivism: “The first book of the first volume seeks, in contrast to the presently popular approach of the Comte and Mill school, to grasp the truly inner structure of the human sciences as they have developed historically. From this I hope to show the necessity of a general grounding [of the human sciences].”⁹⁴ Bambach comments: “Dilthey shared with the positivists a desire to restructure the system of sciences according to a new methodological ideal: the commitment to empirical research in place of abstract systematizing. In the end, however, he wholly repudiated any attachment to Comte’s positive sociology or

91. In his excellent overview of the term (“Historicism: The History and Meaning of the Term,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 56, no. 1 [1995]: 129–52), George G. Iggers traces the term *Historismus* back to Schlegel, who used it to characterize Windelband’s awareness of the “immeasurable distinctness” and “the totally unique nature of Antiquity.” But Iggers argues that the distinction between *Historismus* and *Historizismus*, the latter referring to “the attempts by Hegel and Marx to formulate laws of historical development which were used by the Marxists to legitimize their authoritarian control for eschatological ends” (ibid., 136 and *infra*), is first attested to in Popper’s *The Poverty of Historicism* (New York: Routledge, 1957).

92. Graeme Donald Snooks, *The Laws of History: Exploding the Myth of Social Evolution* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 90.

93. Hodges considers the “empirical philosophy of the British school and the positivism of Comte” to be one of the three “determinative influences in Dilthey’s thinking” (the other two being Kant and Romanticism). H. A. Hodges, *The Philosophy of Wilhelm Dilthey* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1952), 2. Also see Bambach, *Heidegger, Dilthey, and the Crisis of Historicism*, 137, n. 29 for a list of treatments of the topic, though Bambach does not cite Hodges’ work.

94. Cited and translated in Bambach, *Heidegger, Dilthey, and the Crisis of Historicism*, 135; Bambach notes that the citation is from Dilthey’s unpublished letter, the so-called Schoene Brief of 1882; Bambach cites Ulrich Lessing, *Die Idee der Kritik der historischen Vernunft* (Freiburg: Alber, 1984), 111 as his source.

Mill's logic of the moral sciences."⁹⁵ For that reason, Dilthey's grounding, although it was to have a long and significant history of effects, falls out of consideration as a source of influence upon the Indologists. Indeed, there is much the Indologists could have learned from his antimetaphysical, empirical but not empiricist approach, had they chosen to do so. Written in the shadows of what he called the "orgies of empiricism,"⁹⁶ Dilthey's philosophy was well aware of the ideological potential of even the seemingly innocuous commitment to empirical research.

How does historicism manifest itself in the work of Indologists? To answer this question, we must first understand the salient features of historicism as opposed to historism. Inseparable from positivism, historicism makes its crucial appearance in Comte. Schürmann writes that "in Comte, historicization appears in one of its radical—and also simplest—forms. He declares: 'In order to know yourself, know your history' (*Traité de l'esprit du positivisme*)."⁹⁷ As with positivism, so also in historicism, Comte's thesis of the development of the human mind is essential. Comte proposes three stages of development: fetishism, polytheism, and monotheism. Each of these stages is characterized by a search for first and final causes (and hence all are part of the theological stage, broadly speaking). However, the degree of sophistication with which they do so is different in each case. Fetishism represents a primitive stage, where man clarifies natural phenomena by attributing supernatural agents to objects. However, as he matures and observes that phenomena follow certain patterns, fetishism gives way to polytheism. The supernatural agents inherent in objects give way to a limited number of supersensuous, supernatural, and divine agents, who control all phenomena according to laws. The final stage is monotheism, characterized by its faith in one God. These three stages are all subsumed within the theological stage of Comte's Law, but their development parallels the development from the theological to the metaphysical and, finally, positivist stage. In fetishism, animism or anthropomorphism reigns. Polytheism, in contrast, is more critical, as it operates with abstract powers. In this respect, it recalls the metaphysical stage. However, only in the third stage, monotheism, does reason come into its own. Even though man ultimately attributes everything to a supreme Being, the field of operation of his metaphysical imagination is restricted to this one, ultimate instance. Instead of identifying supernatural agents or abstract powers, as in the first two stages, man now confines himself to the objects of sense experience, both inner and outer. As Schürmann notes, "Only that is called reality [now], as opposed to fantasy."⁹⁸

Before we proceed, let us note the irony here: the move beyond metaphysics, now seen as fantasy, into history, now seen as real, is itself metaphysical. Comte is making an ontological claim here: the empirical is the real. Schürmann says: "There is something very metaphysical about his positivism, since it is meant to present a total view

95. Bambach, *Heidegger, Dilthey, and the Crisis of Historicism*, 137.

96. Cited in Bambach, *Heidegger, Dilthey, and the Crisis of Historicism*, 138; Bambach cites Dilthey's *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 1, p. 135 and vol. 4, p. 434 as the source of the phrase.

97. Schürmann, "Methodology of the Social Sciences," 4.

98. *Ibid.*

of history. There is even an ontological thesis underlying it—despite Comte himself—namely that being = appearance.”⁹⁹

From Comte’s clarification of the historical development of man toward positivism, we can now say what is supposed to be scientific about this new science. The task of science as understood by Comte is twofold: on the one hand, the scientific mind tries to grasp what remains the same throughout appearances. On the other, if the mind can understand this selfsame (i.e., identify the law that pertains to its appearance), it can also intervene in these appearances. Primitive man is surrendered to the natural phenomena in which he worships supernatural agents. Modern man is the master of the natural phenomena whose laws he speculatively discloses. This has monumental consequences for the human sciences conceived on analogy with the natural sciences. Schürmann writes: “If the rules of history can be shown, then it is possible to intervene in it. Thus theory and practice are closely intertwined at this third stage. As he [Comte] puts it: both the scholar and the industrialist work with the premise: ‘Savoir pour prévoir, prévoir pour prévenir.’”¹⁰⁰

The pragmatic aspect of human sciences is very important as Comte establishes them. According to Schürmann, it is “this idea of mastery that makes Comte’s three-stage theory understandable.” The theory may not be read “as if history were something unfolding by itself.” Rather, history now becomes “the arena where man progressively makes himself master of his own destiny and of nature.” Through the three stages, man progressively emerges as the “subject of history,” not only in the sense of that which history studies but also in the sense that he is now properly the *subject*. According to Comte’s historicist view, earlier ages lacked such a notion of man’s reflexive subjectivity, but it is precisely this view that instates the subject (modern, self-conscious, self-reflexive) as the goal of history. In Schürmann’s words, “Through the three stages, he [man] progressively constitutes his freedom.”¹⁰¹ This freedom expresses itself in man’s capacity for science, more precisely in the tendency to replace absolute notions with relative, which Comte considers the hallmark of science. As Comte puts it in the second volume of his *Cours*:

If we contemplate the positive spirit in its relation to scientific conception, rather than the mode of procedure, we shall find that this philosophy is distinguished from the theologico-metaphysical by its tendency to render relative the ideas that were at first absolute. This inevitable passage from the absolute to the relative is one of the most important philosophical results of each of the intellectual revolutions that has carried on every kind of speculation from the theological or metaphysical to the scientific stage.¹⁰²

99. Ibid.

100. Ibid.

101. Ibid., 5.

102. Auguste Comte, *Auguste Comte and Positivism: The Essential Writings*, edited and with an Introduction by Gertrude Lenzer (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 220. (All citations hereafter refer to this edition, but see the next but one note.)

This is very different from science as understood thus far in European intellectual history. This is not knowledge for knowledge's sake, as in Aristotle, this is not seeing temporal things in the *lumen naturale* of Aquinas, and it is not Newton's "morsels of wisdom into the workings of God." It is most definitely not the "objectivity" one finds in the natural sciences. The social scientist is an activist, an interventionist, a history transformer, as Schürmann notes.

To obtain so-called objective knowledge is not what matters. Rather the world is—as I said—no longer understood as an objectivity out there, to which our propositions have to conform themselves; the world is to be made. Comte calls the unity of theory and practice "the most enjoyable privilege of the spirit of positivism." This is so, because with the triumph of sciences we have unlearned to ask, What are things? And learned to ask instead, What can we make of them? The connection between science and technology in its modern form is thus a direct result of the discovery of history. "Technique will no longer be exclusively geometrical, mechanical, chemical, etc., but also and primarily political and moral"... even religious: Comte was the founder of a short-lived religion, worshipping 'Humanity'.¹⁰³

Finally, the social scientist also provides his own form of modest, relative, and suitably positivistic kind of salvation in the guise of self-reflexivity. Since the question of method in the human sciences is indissolubly linked to their capacity to transform society, the human sciences do not just reflect society as it is. Rather, the reflection they undertake is a self-reflection of a peculiar kind: it is a *self-reflexive* self-reflection, that is, one that recoils on the subject, transforming it. The social scientist offers not just transformation of history or society (these are his interventionist aspects) but also holds out the promise of a transformation of the self (the soteriological-eschatological aspect).

There is thus an essential connection between positivism and historicism. Comte himself called the "historical method" the "indispensable complement of the positive logic."¹⁰⁴ In contrast to historical inquiry, which treats phenomena in their specificity and tries, as far as this is possible, to understand their evolution out of a set of determinate historical circumstances, historicism may be understood as the attempt to construe the being of historical phenomena as analogous to the being of natural phenomena. The salient point for both is that *phenomena must be subject to universal laws and the scientist's task is to identify these universal laws*. The idea of law, furthermore, plays a foundational role in the constitution of the discipline.

It was necessary for us to outline the essential features of historicism in contradistinction to historism and to trace its intrinsic connection to positivism, because we now see that the approach of the Indologists was not just historical, but *historicist*.

103. Schürmann, "Methodology of the Social Sciences," 5.

104. The complete sentence reads: "Cet indispensable complément de la logique positive consiste dans le mode historique proprement dit, constituant l'investigation, non par simple comparaison, mais par filiation graduelle." Auguste Comte, *Cours de philosophie positive*, vol. 6 (Paris: J. Ballière, 1869), 671 (the passage is not included in the Lenzer edition).

Although they claimed merely to be applying historical methods to the study of India, the “historical method” they applied was not the descriptive approach of Ranke, but the inductive approach of Comte. Comte had called his approach “historical method” because its domain was historical phenomena, just as the domain of experimental method was natural scientific phenomena. But his historical method did not aim at a description of historical events in their specificity and its locus was not (the discipline of) history, but what he called “sociology.”¹⁰⁵ Comte’s historical method was, properly speaking, a method for making observations in keeping with an a priori conception of human nature. As he wrote, “every law of social succession disclosed by the historical method must be unquestionably connected, directly or indirectly, with the positive theory of human nature, and all inductions that cannot stand this test will prove to be illusory, through some sort of insufficiency in the observations on which they are grounded. . . . And thus we find, look where we will, a confirmation of that chief intellectual character of the new science, the philosophical preponderance of the spirit of the whole over the spirit of detail.”¹⁰⁶

Like Comte, Indologists set out in search of such universal laws capable of explaining all of Indian history. In Comte’s case, this had been an a priori law of “the development of human intelligence,” which Comte called “a great fundamental law.”¹⁰⁷ In the case of the Indologists, it would be an a priori law of the decline of Indian civilization from heroic Āryan beginnings to a state of corruption and lassitude, partly under the influence of priests and partly under the influence of the climate.¹⁰⁸ And again, like Comte, they would find observation of historical phenomena to be meaningful

105. Scholars have since labeled it “positive sociology,” because to call Comte’s project “sociology” is no less misleading than to call his method “historical method.”

106. Comte, *Auguste Comte and Positivism*, 251.

107. *Ibid.*, 71.

108. Although we have seen references to this earlier, it is worth collecting all the references as attempts have recently been made to deny the continuity of this thesis in German Indology. The earliest scholar to hypothesize the existence of a pure northern Āryan race was Christian Lassen, who in his *Indische Alterthumskunde* of 1847, claimed that the Āryans “came from the Northwest.” Christian Lassen, *Indische Alterthumskunde*, vol. 1, 513; and also see his “Beiträge zur Kunde des Indischen Alterthum aus dem *Mahābhārata* I,” 75 and *Indische Alterthumskunde*, vol. 1, 2nd ed., 791 for references pertaining to the Mahābhārata; both passages are quoted in chapter 1. Lassen also presented a comprehensive epidemiology of how the Āryans declined owing to a mixture of racial contamination and the effects of climate (Lassen, *Indische Alterthumskunde*, vol. 1, 410–12), besides explicitly contrasting the Indo-German race to the Semitic (*ibid.*, 414–17). Thereafter, Holtzmann Jr., also made use of this interpretive scheme (see his *Zur Geschichte und Kritik*, 45–46 and 33, both passages are quoted in chapter 1). Hermann Oldenberg also attributed northern origins to the Āryan race (see especially his *Buddha: sein Leben, seine Lehre, seine Gemeinde* [Berlin: Wilhelm Hertz, 1881], 9 and 11–12, reprising many of Lassen’s comments about the spiritual and physical decline of the Āryans under the influence of the Indian climate). Still later, the leading Indologist of the day, Richard Garbe, invoked the thesis of racial degeneracy to explain ancient India’s cultural achievements (which he attributed entirely to the Āryan race), whereas the customs of the mixed Hindu race were presumed to have originated not from the Āryans but from “the darker side [von der schwarzen Seite].” According to him, “in the present day, the blood of the Hindus is without a doubt only Aryan to the smallest degree, and even the Brahman families have been starkly contaminated

only insofar as these phenomena conformed to, that is to say, could be *integrated into a general law of the evolution of history*. What counted as genuinely “scientific” about the new discipline was not the discovery of events per se (indeed, Oldenberg conceded that colonial administrators “working locally and on site” were better placed to carry out historical inquiries of an empirical and material nature), but the realization of their conformity to *law*. Here was where German scholars excelled. As Oldenberg noted, Englishmen, French, Russian, and Japanese had played a more significant role in bringing historical phenomena—be it events, social circumstances, or documents—to light. But when it came to bringing order to those discoveries by integrating them into an a priori conception of history, German scholars took the lead. In an article published in *Internationale Wochenschrift für Wissenschaft, Kunst und Technik* (*The International Weekly for Science, Art, and Technology*), Oldenberg clarified the roles of the different nations as follows: “Englishmen bring the material to light. They collect the manuscripts, inscriptions, coins. They organize the excavations. . . . The activity of the French, too, has, in recent years, approximated a similar character.”¹⁰⁹ Russian and Japanese scholars, too, were assigned merely a preparatory role: “Multiple relationships to the central Asian and Tibetan regions endow the activity of the Russian Indologists with [its specific] character. The origin of one of their main religions out of India [endows] the efforts of the Japanese, which have in recent years begun promisingly, [with its specific character].”¹¹⁰ In contrast, Oldenberg argued of the “German Indologists” that they could not “profit from relationships of this tangible kind. Many of them have never been to the country their work concerns. Out of this and, in certain respects, from the unique nature of German philological-historical research in general we can understand why for at least a section of German Indologists the focus on making new material accessible had to take a backseat to that of the critical analysis [Durcharbeitung] of texts, to that of the solution of historical problems; [while] the striving for immediate, lively concrete contemplation of the Indian essence [had to take a backseat to] the effort to *arrange the Indian formations* [Gebilde] *in further contexts* [and] *via a comparative observation make them serviceable to the solution of broader problems*.”¹¹¹

The idea of reciprocity between what the discipline studied (and brought to light as the law of historical progression) and the discipline itself plays a major role in Comte’s conception of a science of positive history. Comte had argued of the new

with barbarian blood.” Richard Garbe, *Indische Reiseskizzen* (Berlin: Gebrüder Paetel, 1889), 86. In this new “scientifically” legitimated form, the thesis would later be a cornerstone of Erich Frauwallner’s racial construal of the history of Indian philosophy (see his “Der arische Anteil an der indischen Philosophie” and *Geschichte der indischen Philosophie*, vols. 1–2, but the relevant passages, along with other source materials are superbly presented in Jakob Stuchlik, *Der arische Ansatz: Erich Frauwallner und der Nationalsozialismus* [Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2009]), as well as of Hauer’s stern warning to the German nation to learn its lesson from the weakening of the Āryan race in India (see his *Eine indo-arische Metaphysik*, 63, the passage is cited in chapter 3 earlier).

109. Oldenberg, “Indologie,” 641.

110. Ibid.

111. Ibid., 641–42 (italics added).

sociology that, “it asks from history something more than counsel and instruction to perfect conceptions that are derived from another source: it seeks its own general direction, through the whole system of historical conclusions.”¹¹² We find a similar reciprocity in the case of Indology: there was a consonance between the laws whose discovery was necessary to explain Indian history and the laws that guaranteed scientificity to Indology. Indeed, they were one and the same. Just as “positive sociology” revealed itself to be “both the fulfilment and the science of history,”¹¹³ Indology turned out to be “both the fulfilment and the science of (Indian) history.” Even though Oldenberg had cited Mommsen approvingly, most Indologists were not interested in a descriptive general history. Rather, as works with titles such as *Deutsch-indische Geistesbeziehungen* (Ludwig Alsdorf), *India and the Germans: 500 Years of Indo-German Contacts* (Walter Leifer), and *Impact of Indian Thought on German Poets and Philosophers* (Wilfried Nölle) attest,¹¹⁴ they saw themselves as *participants in the narrative of Indian history itself*. The Indologist is, as we noted earlier of the social scientist in general, an activist, an interventionist, a history transformer. This aspect of their science was important for German Indologists as they understood their work. Indology devoid of its interventionist, *aufklärerische*, and simultaneously restorative and reformatory concerns would be dissolved into the discipline of history. Hence, they insisted that there was a unique domain of objects that called for the development of autonomous (Indological) methods. It was important for them to dismiss not only the claims of their British and Continental colleagues to participation in the narrative of Indian history but also the claims of their colleagues in history departments at German universities, who were their rivals and challengers in offering an account of Indian history. Thus began the project of discovering a different set of laws alongside the principles invoked by the historian: laws that specifically governed the Indian context and hence could also be used to explain it. These laws would constitute an annex or supplement to the laws of history; without them, Indian history could not be sufficiently explained. Here was where the theory of the absence of history among Indian peoples came into its own. First, there was the thesis that “historical development tends to be more weakly, more nebulously formed in India than in the west.”¹¹⁵ Lest the historian nonetheless attempt to study Indian history, there was the need for the further addendum that this history could not be relied upon without further ado. Thus Oldenberg now argued, “it [i.e., historical development] lies in a transmission before us that does everything [possible] in order to obscure its image completely: this transmission without firm dates, which often confuses old and new to a seemingly hopeless extent. . . .”¹¹⁶ There was thus need for extreme suspicion when approaching Indian history, which suspicion could not get a purchase until one knew, first of all, how to decipher Indian history to identify the guilty party. One had to know of the material in front of one that it “continuously presents us with illusions with the pretentious [anspruchsvoll] wisdom of its masses of commentaries that only owe their existence to the sophistry of the scholastics in place

112. Comte, *Auguste Comte and Positivism*, 252.

113. Snooks, *The Laws of History*, 93.

114. See bibliography for complete citations.

115. Oldenberg, “Indische und klassische Philologie,” 6.

116. *Ibid.*

of genuine thoughts and institutions.”¹¹⁷ The Indologist, as opposed to the historian, possessed the necessary suspicion (indeed, hostility) toward the tradition. But there was also a further quality he brought along with him: an a priori scheme for reconstructing Indian history. As Oldenberg put it, “the more we...know of the history of India,” the more it appeared “as an incoherent rise and fall of accidental events.”¹¹⁸ “These events lack a secure hold and the meaningful sense such as that the power of a national spirit [Volksgeistes] that wills and transforms its will into deeds lends history [Geschehen].”¹¹⁹ Thus, one could not simply reconstruct Indian history without first having some idea of the laws that governed it. Whence were these laws to be obtained? Here Oldenberg is quite unambiguous: it is “only in the history of ideas, above all of religious thought,” that we find “firm ground.” “We can hardly speak of a history in any other sense here [i.e., as pertains to India].”¹²⁰ And so, the Indologists, who since the time of Rudolf von Roth had been deeply concerned (we might even say, *obsessed*) with Indian religions, were naturally positioned to take over the task of studying Indian antiquity from the historian.

Finally, there were the narrowly historicist aspects of the German Indologists’ praxis, understood as the belief that the past has nothing to teach us and hence can only be studied from a historical perspective. Although this appears at first to be the most prominent feature of historicism, it is in many ways but a consequence of Comte’s understanding of science. As F. A. Hayek insightfully grasped, “The idea of recognisable laws, not only of the growth of individual minds, but of the development of the knowledge of the human race as a whole, pre-supposes that the human mind could, so to speak, look down on itself from a higher plane and be able not merely to understand its operations from the inside, but also to observe it, as it were, from the outside.... What this belief really amounts to is that the products of the process of mind can be comprehended as a whole by a simpler process than the laborious one of understanding them, and that the individual mind, looking at these results from the outside, can then directly connect these wholes by laws applying to them as entities, and finally, by extrapolating the observed development, achieve a kind of shortcut to future development.”¹²¹ Calling this “empirical theory of the development of the collective mind” “the most naive and [at the same time] the most influential result of the application of the procedure of the natural sciences to social phenomena,” Hayek argues that it is here that the belief in our ability to “recognize the ‘mutability’ of our mind and of its laws” and the belief in our ability to “control [our] future development” arises.¹²² But a corollary of this view of science, more precisely, of self-reflexive understanding as the hallmark of science, is that the past, which has not been able to grasp itself in this way (*ex hypothesi*, the past is never able to grasp itself in this way; it is only the individual mind at present that can, as

117. Ibid.

118. Oldenberg, “Ueber Sanskritforschung,” 406.

119. Ibid.

120. Ibid.

121. F. A. Hayek, *Studies on the Abuse and Decline of Reason: Text and Documents*, ed. Bruce Caldwell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 269–70.

122. Ibid., 270.

Hayek says, “lift itself up by its own bootstraps”¹²³), no longer appears relevant to us. Its function is reduced to that of serving as a mere iteration of the human mind in its progression toward the self-reflexive contemplation of the individual mind at this present moment. The past, on this view, has no intrinsic value; its value is entirely a function of the position it is assigned in a continuum and only in this way does it become, for the first time, truly *past*.

By integrating the Indian past into a teleological narrative of history, Indologists historicized Indian culture. They were not just proposing that one could study Indian history, which historians had in any case done to varying extents for centuries. Rather, they were proposing that Indian texts could only be studied as dead letters, within a metanarrative of history that accounted for their being dead in terms of the movement of historical reason. (The same metanarrative did double duty, since it also justified why the Western Indologist had to be taken seriously: he was the embodiment of that selfsame reason in its latest, and perhaps final, incarnation.) The specifics of the narrative discovered or projected were less important in each case than the fact that such a narrative was *needed* in order for the Indologists to be able to make sense of Indian texts at all. Indeed, the narrative could even have been true in one or the other respects (although we found that it was not). But the discovery of “laws” governing Indian history was crucial, because it first allowed Indologists to identify events as conforming to such-and-such a type, to integrate them into their histories, to make sense of them as making sense of their own position as the inheritors of Indian antiquity. Thus, although they claimed to be merely proceeding empirically, in actual practice their work was weighed down by a heavy burden of metaphysical, historicist, empiricist and scientific presuppositions.

The faith in the mind’s ability to hover above itself and its history and thus to achieve a kind of “shortcut to future developments” (to use Hayek’s expression) also explains the Indologists’ confidence in being able to advise Indians on what was to be done by them. The Indologist, as we have seen earlier, understands his role not just as that of providing a commentary on Indian history but also as that of, *through critique*, transforming it. This aspect of their praxis remained, for the most part, latent (although it could occasionally also come to the fore in the writings of more religiously or politically motivated Indologists such as Hacker and Stietenron).¹²⁴ To be sure, this understanding of the social scientists’ role has its explicit role-model in Comte, who remarked, “Savoir pour prévoir, prévoir pour prévenir.” But Indologists, by tying the Comtean program of positive sociology to the encounter with a

123. Ibid.

124. A few of the more important of Hacker’s writings on Hinduism are listed in the bibliography. The best summary of Hacker’s works is in Joydeep Bagchee, “The Invention of Difference and the Assault on Ecumenism: Paul Hacker Becomes a Catholic,” paper presented at the 3rd *Rethinking Religion in India* conference, Pardubice, Czech Republic, 11–14 October, 2011. The paper includes a comprehensive bibliography of Hacker’s writings, including polemical pieces Hacker wished suppressed from his collected essays (*Kleine Schriften*). Bagchee demonstrates how, behind the facade of a scholar and university professor, hid a religious fundamentalist, who in Christian pamphlets and newsletters denounced Hinduism as an unethical religion and argued for an aggressive program of religious conversion. Although motivated by political rather than religious concerns,

non-European culture, gave it a new, racially-tinged edge. German Indology perpetually affirmed Comte's axiom. As a discipline, it heartily agrees with Comte that, as Schürmann puts it, "the 'method,' in positivism, clearly is not merely a method for the formation of concepts. It is at the same time a method of intervention. This is an entirely new notion of science."¹²⁵ This intervention meant different things to different generations of Indologists. To some, it meant displacing Semitism from the center of European history with a nobler, purer Āryan origin, and this entailed mastery of Sanskrit and sustained dedication to linguistics. To others, it meant supplying Germany with an identity, particularly that of the modern, enlightened scientist. A more banal intervention of a personal sort also played a big role: positions of power within the ranks of academic institutions. German Indology thus sees itself not merely as learning and collecting objective knowledge as in the case of natural sciences. It is *more*: the German Indologist directly intervenes in history and changes it. On the one hand, Indians are to be shown to be at the mercy of the tyranny of their misshapen, lecherous, and fantastical gods.¹²⁶ Even more urgently, they are to be shown as being subject to the tyranny of priestly authority. Texts need to be purified of Brahmanical interpolations and metaphysical speculations. Freedom on a political and cultural level, in this idiom, can *only* be secured when the task of securing texts coincides with *purifying* them. Thus, we have seen in the third chapter the profuse enthusiasm with which German Indologists vied with each other to find excuses to dissect the Gītā. If only Brahmanical and *bhakti* aspects were removed, Indians, as brethren in the world humanitarian project, could stand up as good, *free* Kṣatriyas, interpreted here to mean as good Prussian soldiers. Or very nearly so. More importantly, the Indologist must keep the Enlightenment torch burning at home in Germany, as Slaje, Hanneder, and Bronkhorst argue. Thus the Indologists allied themselves with whoever was in power to do their best to be philologist-kings or at least philologist-advisors.

It is important to keep this aspect in mind when considering German Mahābhārata studies. What could be more invigorating than a *Blut und Eisen* model of the great

Stietencron's writings share Hacker's concern with influencing contemporary Hinduism through deconstructing (the concept of) Hindu identity; a good place to begin is Heinrich von Stietencron, "Hinduism," in *Secularization and the World's Religions*, ed. Hans Joas and Klaus Wiegandt (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009), 122–40. His secularist zealotry is also in evidence in: "Religious Configurations in Pre-Muslim India and the Modern Concept of Hinduism," 51–81 and in "Hinduism: On the Proper Use of a Deceptive Term," in *Hinduism Reconsidered*, ed. G. D. Sontheimer and Hermann Kulke (Delhi: Manohar, 1989), 11–27.

125. Schürmann, "Methodology of the Social Sciences," 4.

126. See Oldenberg, "Indologie," 641, commenting that "its gods [i.e., the gods of Hinduism] are the misshapen, wild, cruel, [and] lascivious Hindu gods, at their head Shiva and Vishnu" and see also Garbe, *Indische Reiseskizzen*, 85: "there is no bridge from the radiant forms [Lichtgestalten] of the Veda to the forms of the modern gods [modernen Göttergestalten] [of Hinduism], whose monstrous representations with their tastelessly multiplied animal limbs and so on, should be familiar to all, at least as a type. . . . In spite of their *Āryan* names, I consider the modern Hindu gods—Shiva, Vishnu, Durga, Hanuman, and whatever else they may be called—not to be *Āryan* conceptions, but to be conceptions of the aborigines. . . ." (Garbe's emphasis).

epic of India?¹²⁷ Thus begins the complex seduction of the experiment of forging a Kṣatriya Urepos from the Mahābhārata. But the transformation was not just directed outward at Indian history or society, but inward *at the researcher's historical situation itself*. The former two were to be remade in the mold of the German scholar's interpretation, even if the most dubious evidence had to be brought forth to convince Indians that they had once been blood brothers in the Āryan rationalist project. The history recounted was always an eschatological history embodying a concrete vision of what India could be if it but followed the German scholar's missives. But at the same time as the Germans intervened in the subject of their researches, they were placing themselves at the head of this narrative of history: if the scholar-scientist can put in place a historical narrative that culminates in Western, enlightened self-consciousness, then the scholar-priest who is the epitome of that consciousness becomes the very meaning of history itself. Thus behind the German scientists' mournful glances backward at Indian history was also a rather self-serving look forward at their own historical present. Who would pay them to tell tales of ancient Indian history unless those tales simultaneously reflected Germany (and German scholarship) in a good light?

Lest we think that this transformative, ideological aspect was secondary to the conduct of a pure science, we should recall that the relation of knowledge to its results differs in the case of the human sciences as compared to the natural sciences. Natural sciences, for the most part, exist for the sake of knowing, although technology arises out of them as a welcome but not essential consequence. Not so with the human sciences, where the "link between theory and practice is true of all schools that have arisen from Auguste Comte's project, viz. Empirico-criticism (Richard Avenarius), Logical Positivism (Ernst Mach, Rudolf Carnap, Alfred Ayer), and today so-called Analytic and Linguistic Philosophy (except Ludwig Wittgenstein)."¹²⁸ In the natural sciences, the step from the realm of fact to that of pure logic and mathematics must be undone in a step back to the realm of fact if the science is to turn into technology. Since the human sciences never leave the realm of fact in spite of the Indologists' protestations that they are operating with pure models of the epic or the Gītā, that step back has always already become redundant. Finally, there is the ethical aspect. As Schürmann notes, "A society gets the philosophy that it deserves. It should not come as a surprise that a technological society recognizes itself best in positivist thinking. But this only illustrates the practical orientation of this entire school of thinking."¹²⁹ Schürmann, speaking after the horrific genocides of the twentieth century, teaches us a valuable lesson: *a society gets the philosophy it deserves*. If the social scientists who interpreted the Bhagavadgītā and the epic had, instead, interpreted it as a call for understanding the *limits* of history and martial glorification, one wonders

127. The words are a reference to a famous speech made by Bismarck (the "Iron Chancellor") before the Budget Committee of the Prussian Assembly on September 30, 1862, in a plea for supporting his proposed reforms of the Prussian army. The full sentence runs: "The great questions of the day will not be settled by means of speeches and majority decisions . . . but by iron and blood."

128. Schürmann, "Methodology of the Social Sciences," 6.

129. Ibid.

if they could they have made a difference. Gandhi's Indian experiment with the Gītā (see the conclusion of this book) seems to suggest that perhaps they could have. But by taking the turn toward historicism, Indology closed off the avenue to a social philosophy informed by emancipatory concerns no less than to a historical science informed by humanistic concerns.

The point bears repeating. Whereas Indologists would like to see themselves as either in the tradition of Ranke and Droysen (when it comes to *Geschichtsschreibung*) or in the tradition of Dilthey (when it comes to the *Geisteswissenschaften*), their true intellectual pedigree is neither of these. Indeed, there flourished a strong German tradition of historiography on India in history departments—quite independent of Indology and its fundamentalist, interventionist concerns. Dilthey's emphasis upon *Verstehen* (understanding) as the specific characteristic of the human sciences (as opposed to *Erklären* in the natural sciences, which *explain* things) was to influence Heidegger and to become a model for the philosophical hermeneutics of Gadamer. Dilthey would have been much more sympathetic to the ideal of Indian studies we have been (implicitly) proposing than to Indology. He would recognize in the former an attempt to understand what is unique and special about the human sciences, whereas he would see the latter as embodying precisely the tendency he sought to combat: to construe the scientific character of the human sciences as identical with that of the natural sciences.

If the first of the three aspects we identified as underwriting the scientific character of Indology—positivism—led to a dead end, and the second—historicism—led to a wrong turn, what of the third? Does empiricism constitute a more viable alternative for grounding the scientific character of Indology?

EMPIRICISM AND THE SEARCH FOR GENERAL PROPOSITIONS

A good place to begin our inquiry into the empiricism of Indology is to ask how precisely empiricism was understood in the writings of nineteenth-century Orientalists. Specifically, we should ask whether they understood empiricism merely in the sense of a moment in research practice or as a philosophical doctrine and epistemological position.¹³⁰ The latter is more correctly described as an *empiricist* stance and, like historicism (which was not itself historical but referred to an a priori metaphysical understanding of history), is not itself empirical but describes a metaphysical theory of concept formation in the social (and natural) sciences.

Oldenberg, in his statements on the scientific character of Indology, had opposed its positivist and historicist aspects to the tradition, which he explicitly accused of engaging in metaphysical speculation, that is, speculation exceeding the sphere of empirical reality. "Instead of history," he charged, "religion, poetry, reflection and

130. This is how the distinction is encapsulated in the Collins Dictionary of Sociology, for example; see D. Jary and J. Jary, eds., *Collins Dictionary: Sociology*, 3rd ed. (Glasgow: HarperCollins, 2009).

dreaming [Sinnen und Träumen] of world forgetful [weltvergessender] philosophers plays the dominant role in the literary products of India.”¹³¹ “During the period when, in a healthy nation, the interest in its own past and its relationship to the wars and sufferings of the present awoke, where Herodotus and Fabius, the narrators of what had occurred would normally appear, the literary activity of India was sunk in theological and philosophical speculation.”¹³² Oldenberg specifically critiqued the tendency to “pantheism” he found to be widespread in later (that is, post-Vedic) Indian thought. Thus, whereas the earlier phases of Indian history more or less replicated the evolution of Western culture (that is, as Oldenberg understood it), moving from primitive nature speculation (Comte’s fetishism) to identifying abstract powers as gods (Comte’s polytheism), this process was interrupted at a certain stage in Indian thought. “It has been fatal,” he says, “for all thought and poetry in India that, early on, a second world, filled with strangely fantastic shapes, was established there alongside the real world. This was the place of sacrifice with its three sacred fires and the schools in which the virtuosos of the sacrificial art were educated—a sphere of strangest activity and the playground of a subtle, empty esotericism [Geheimniskrämerei], whose enervating power over the spirit of an entire nation we can scarcely comprehend in its full extent.”¹³³ In place of the monotheism leading finally to positivism, which should have been the successor to fetishism and polytheism, Indian thought goes astray down the path of speculation. Oldenberg sees one brief shining moment when Indian tradition might have taken the turn to an empiricism motivated by positivistic concerns: “Earlier and stronger than among any other people of antiquity, interest and joy in analyzing language scientifically [die Sprache wissenschaftlich zu zergliedern] developed in India. One developed with dazzling perspicuity and precision the observation of the individual consonants and of the changes to which they are subject to a system, from which, as it became known in Europe, the science [Wissenschaft] of our century found reason to learn with [due] admiration.”¹³⁴ But it was not to be. “Naturally, the brilliance and profundity of these Vedic linguists was shadowed, as though by a curse, by a genuinely Indian tendency toward sophism; the joy, out of which at times something like a bizarre schadenfreude seems to emerge, of cloaking the things [Dinge] in an artificial robe and forcing it upon them, of building labyrinths of subtleties, in whose twisting passageways the well-versed and cunning expert knew how to pretentiously find his way.”¹³⁵

In contrast to this penchant for developing metaphysical systems of thought rather than turning to the things, *Dinge*, themselves, Oldenberg understands his task as being one of rigorously introducing empiricism into the pantheism of the Indians, subverting its speculative, anti-empirical character. He does so, of course, less by exposing the problems with speculative thought than assuming speculative thought to be a priori inadmissible. We do not find an explicit engagement with (much less an analysis of) Indian philosophy. Rather, Oldenberg seeks to explain phenomena such

131. Oldenberg, “Indologie,” 638.

132. Oldenberg, “Ueber Sanskritforschung,” 406.

133. Ibid., 396.

134. Ibid., 399.

135. Ibid.

as myths, magical incantations, sacrificial rituals, and philosophical doctrines (especially concerning the identity of the cosmos with Being) in positivist, historicist, and empiricist terms. From a positivist perspective, he seeks to convert the beliefs of ancient authors (concerning the immortality of soul, the connection between the personal and the suprapersonal spheres, etc.) into expressions of the universal mind, albeit one that is still at a primitive stage in its development. Thus, theories are explained psychologically in terms of the desire of the ancient man to control his environment, to address his fears of death, and to find comfort in the thought of a cosmic justice. From a historicist perspective, the thesis of the progressive development of Indian thought from primitive beginnings in nature worship to its mature, pantheistic stage comes to his aid. Thus, magic and ritual are explained as developing from the core of the nature worship of Āryan tribes. In his book on the philosophy of the Upaniṣads,¹³⁶ Oldenberg describes how Vedic gods such as Indra gradually lost ground to the interest in sacrifice, leading, finally, to the emergence of a specialized class of ritual technicians, the Brahmins.¹³⁷ They, being more interested in “magic than in the worship of Gods,” “now took up the next task, of explaining all this [i.e., the sacrificial ritual, gods, being and existence] in their own way so as to secure all power in the hands of the knower.”¹³⁸ “Here we have reached the point where we encounter the Brahmanic science of sacrifice, which requires our attention as the foundation and breeding ground of the great pantheistic speculation.”¹³⁹ Likewise, the belief in the efficacy of magic is explained in terms of primitive man’s belief that if there exists an identity or resemblance between two things, then the one can be used to control the other.

So much is easy to understand, that one eats the heart of a bear or of a bird of prey in order to become courageous, that one smears the brains of a wise man onto one’s forehead in order to gain wisdom: in that very heart or brain dwells the essence of courage, of wisdom; in this way, one takes it up into oneself. Other equivalences can also be understood such as the mystic identity that is imagined [to exist] between the shadow of a being or even its footsteps or its name and, on the other hand, he himself such that the one who takes hold of the one also has the other [in his control]. Or effects such as that, when produced by a magician in the right way, the illusion of rain brings about rain. The one signifies the other, it is the other.¹⁴⁰

From an empirical perspective as well, Oldenberg believes he has found the key to the metaphysical speculation of the Indians. It is rooted, he argues, in a distrust and distaste for empirical reality, which was to be subordinated to a higher, eternal principle. “In all occurrences, one saw only this, that it was transient: and one recognized everything transient, we may not even say, as a simulacrum [Gleichnis], but

136. Hermann Oldenberg, *Die Lehre der Upanishaden und die Anfänge des Buddhismus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1915).

137. *Ibid.*, 12–14.

138. *Ibid.*, 15.

139. *Ibid.*

140. *Ibid.*, 11 (Oldenberg’s emphasis).

as absolutely worthless, an unhappy nothing [ein unglückliches Nichts] from which the knowing one had to free his thoughts.”¹⁴¹ What Oldenberg specifically criticizes about Indian thought is not that it did not accept perception as a source of knowledge. Indeed, he would likely have known (although he does not mention it) that Indian tradition, too, under the heading of *pratyakṣa*, considered the senses one source of knowledge, albeit one that operates under specific limitations.¹⁴² Rather, his criticism of tradition takes the form of an a priori claim that empirical experience is the sole means of knowledge such that all statements must be reducible to their empirical content. According to Oldenberg, there is no statement of Indian thought that cannot, through some combination of positivistic, historicist, or empiricist explanation, be reduced to a positive datum, that is, to a positum. *This holds all the more so for the conception of knowledge of the time.*

At that time, the relation of man to knowledge appeared in a different light; the acquisition of knowledge, therefore, took place in a very different form than in our time, which is glutted with knowledge and operates with it in objective and businesslike fashion. Ancient concepts step in here. Just as the name of a being, its image or shadow stands in the closest mystical connection to it, so also knowledge of it. The saying ‘knowledge is power’ is true here in another sense than that familiar to us: not, as we understand it, in the sense that it enables us to act rightly, but directly, in the sense that it produces a mysterious connection between the knower and the thing known; for example, the way it might contain an immediate magical power over the object of knowledge within itself, whereas the same object might take revenge upon the knower for his insufficient or false knowledge.¹⁴³

The basis for Oldenberg’s comparison of Indian and Western philosophy, then, was a thoroughgoing empiricism. Oldenberg not only defended sense experience as the main (and perhaps, *sole*) source of human knowledge, but also rejected the claim to knowledge implicit in other means of knowledge. When the Indian tradition spoke of supersensuous reality, hidden connections, or nonmaterial forces, it was not just invoking alternative sources of knowledge, ones that could exist alongside empirical knowledge and perhaps extend it; it was “subtle, empty esotericism,”¹⁴⁴ “a tendency toward sophism,”¹⁴⁵ and a “different form” of knowledge altogether, which could scarcely be compared to our own.¹⁴⁶ The gulf between the two conceptions was

141. Oldenberg, “Ueber Sanskritforschung,” 406.

142. *Pratyakṣa*, for example, is incapable of giving us mediate or supersensuous knowledge. At least in some schools, when we see smoke, we require an additional step beyond perception to attain the knowledge “there is fire.” This knowledge is gained through *anumāna* or inference. Likewise, when it comes to supersensuous reality, Indian philosophy holds that *pratyakṣa* cannot be of aid. Rather, what is required is a different *pramāṇa*, or valid means of knowledge, namely, *śabda* or authoritative testimony, especially as contained in the revealed texts, the Vedas.

143. Oldenberg, *Die Lehre der Upanishaden*, 6–7.

144. Oldenberg, “Ueber Sanskritforschung,” 396.

145. *Ibid.*, 399.

146. Oldenberg, *Die Lehre der Upanishaden*, 6.

absolute and yet not unbridgeable, for Oldenberg proposed that Western scholarship could nonetheless make sense of traditional ideas of knowledge by explaining them historically and empirically. He notes that the Brahmins' "representations of things and events was fundamentally different from what appears real to modern man, indeed, as representable." The difficulty, for him, is resolved through the category of "'prelogical' intellectual constitutions." "Naturally, that is not to say that the theology or metaphysics of the Brahmins has remained at this prelogical level. But it is as yet on the path of separating out from it and has not, as yet, covered great distances in all respects on this path."¹⁴⁷ "Only later—for the period of which we shall speak, this lies for the most part in the future—one learns, instead of the imaginary occurrences, to see the real."¹⁴⁸ When looking back at a past that had not as yet learned to see "the real," the challenge was to find categories to translate and explain these experiences into ideas and categories familiar to nineteenth-century audiences. Herein lay the justification for Indology as a public and publicly funded discipline.

When it comes to grounding the scientific character of Indology, however, empiricism too proves to be no solution. First, there is the problem, already alluded to above, that empiricism itself is not empirical, but rather, a metaphysical theory of experience. There is the further problem that, as understood by Oldenberg, the empiricism of Indology did not simply refer to the use of sense data as a moment in research, but the much more problematic claim that *all* knowledge claims could be reduced to their empirical conditions. The latter clearly breaches the domain of possible sense experience; it makes a totalizing claim about how all experience (even that of *others*) is to be understood. Finally, rigorous empiricism runs into problems when it comes to identifying the kind of general propositions Indologists were seeking. Here, a look at Mill's radical empiricism is instructive.

Empiricism, understood as the view that sense experience is a source of knowledge (of reality), was not new. Before Comte and Mill, the British empiricists (Locke, Berkeley, Hume) knew of the view and had defended it. But what is new about the empiricism of Comte and Mill is the emphasis on induction as the method of empirical science. In his *System of Logic* (1843), which appeared the year following the publication of Comte's sixth and last volume of the *Cours de philosophie positive*, J. S. Mill proposed two theses: first, all knowledge is based on the data of sense experience; second, there is nothing beyond the realm of experience (i.e., no rational intuitable nature of things in itself). The latter was especially contentious. Following Hume's skeptical attacks on empiricism, leading to the extreme skeptical conclusion that no knowledge of causality was possible setting out from an empiricist framework, philosophers had struggled in a number of ways to resuscitate knowledge of external reality. Kant famously remarked that Hume "awoke him from his dogmatic slumbers." Hume had argued that we may associate two events with each other based on the observation that they always occur in succession, but we cannot assert a causal

147. *Ibid.*, 10.

148. *Ibid.*, 12.

connection on this basis. Kant's solution had been to propose that we do not infer or intuit causality from the manifold of sense experience, but that it constitutes one of the a priori categories of the understanding through which we institute order in the manifold (in this case, introducing the idea of cause and effect). For Mill, however, the task was to reconcile a radical empiricism with mathematics and logic. His solution was to propose induction as the method of science. Whereas Hume had stopped with association, Mill proposed that the mind moved from observations to inductive generalizations. Although these could not have the apodictic certainty of deduction, by combining the notion of inductive logic with that of psychologically necessary connections in the mind, Mill offered a robust defense of science.

Indologists wishing to ground the scientific character of Indology in empiricism might have taken a closer look at Mill, especially at his five laws of induction, through which he sought to defend empirical observation as leading to more than particular knowledge:

1. Method of agreement. If two cases or more, in which one fact occurs, share only one feature, this is the cause or the effect of both cases.
2. Method of difference. If two occurrences both contain a phenomenon W in a given circumstance A—but not, when A is absent—then W depends on A.
3. Joined method of agreement and difference. If certain cases contain a phenomenon W when A is given, and if other cases, when A is not given, also do not contain W, then A is the condition of W.
4. Method rests. When W depends on A = A1, A2, A3, then to discover the dependence of A1 and A2 is to establish that A3 depends on W.
5. Method of parallel transformation. If an appearance W changes as soon as another, U, changes, whereby an increase or decrease of W occurs with an increase or decrease of U, then U depends on W.¹⁴⁹

Mill's work, which presents an epistemological defense of empiricism, would have permitted the Indologists to go beyond mere association to actually asserting scientific claims about the text (more precisely, to actually asserting the scientificity of their claims about the text). Thus, it seems as though, if these laws hold, the project of converting philosophical, literary, mythic claims in the Indian texts into rigorously empirical facts could, in fact, get underway. We could then really undertake the task posed by Oldenberg of presenting a scientific (and this means, exclusively empirical) account of the texts. Rather than being an ad hoc method of interpretation, Mill's laws would be the principle that grants scientificity to Indology.

Yet, when we look more closely at the way German scholars tackled the Gītā, we find no such consistency. Even though the scholars studied here all valorized their approach as scientific and empirical, they did not adhere to basic principles for developing general propositions from empirical data. To be sure, they cannot be faulted for not having an education in Mill's *System of Logic*. But when one borrows general ideas of science from the intellectual climate of the time and, moreover, makes those

149. Schürmann, "Methodology of the Social Sciences," 7.

ideas into a rhetorical weapon, one should also know something of the intellectual history of those ideas. In the case of Indology, empiricism was a basic tenet of scholarship, yet most Indologists did not even understand the problems with empiricism. They were using some combination of Mill's laws (although, of course, without being explicitly aware of them as such) in the most random fashion. A few examples may suffice here. First, the method comes in too late: from the beginning, German *Gītā* scholars were hamstrung by the war narrative hypothesis. All of these scholars shared the opinion formalized by Jacobi but imagined by others before him, that the entire epic, like Homer's *Iliad*, is essentially a historical record, restricted to a depiction of war. This prejudice prevented an objective evaluation of the text in question: it presents itself, among other things, as a Veda for all members of society.¹⁵⁰ We have shown that various subjective prejudices necessarily relating to German identity are at work here. These scholars neither questioned their premises nor subjected their criteria to scrutiny. Whatever the methodological rigor of inductive argumentation, it arrives too late and presents itself dogmatically. Second, the text in question is a philosophical work, necessarily populated by various perspectives. The *adding* of a layer for each perspective creates multiple texts, as demonstrated. The inductive method in this context shatters rather than explains the basic text. Third, the text in question is a poetic, literary work. This necessarily means that the text uses the same terms with several meanings, and several terms with the same meaning, in order to achieve proper rhetorical effect. The application of inductive laws must be fine-tuned to accommodate for such variance. In all of the scholars studied here, we find no such adjustment. Fourth, in addition to its poetic, literary qualities, the text in question is also a pedagogical work. This means that arguments occur in a specific order. Thus, although the discussion of the *Gītā* does begin with Arjuna's dilemma concerning his proximate duty, this is by no means the ultimate concern of either being human or of the text, which purports to teach Arjuna the courage to be, not merely the courage to fight. Rules of induction must therefore also be fine-tuned to allow for this pedagogical crescendo of meaning; otherwise, the application of rules has the unintended consequence of creating data for a text that does not exist: a monotone. Then there is the problem of circularity in the *Kṣatriya* hypothesis and the method of finding "interpolations" that challenge that hypothesis. Last but not least, the scholar must be trained not only in method but also in grammar, logic, philosophy, and poetics, as well as being skilled in the delicate task of hermeneutics.¹⁵¹ Since such scholars are rare, we ought to depend, to some extent, on a plurality of

150. See *Mahābhārata* 12.314.45 and *Bhagavadgītā* 9.32. The appellation *strī-sūdra-veda* or a "Veda for women and *sūdras*" for the *Mahābhārata*, in contrast, is late.

151. In all these cases, notice that it is the text that demands a better method rather than an intrinsic flaw in this method. Positivistic research may or may not be a satisfactorily scientific method in itself, but a naïve trust in the universal applicability of this method to all texts, whatever their genre, self-presentation, form, and philosophical signification, turns out to be misplaced. Still, it is one thing to supplement positivistic methods with others such as hermeneutics and traditional commentaries. To label this inadequately refined and shabbily applied positivism to texts with the dogmatic, authoritative, and uncritically normative claim that this is the most rigorous, scientific, and objective of all approaches betrays the very spirit of the Enlightenment.

perspectives, interpretations, and approaches. Obsessed by nationalism, however, German Indologists rejected pluralism. The German *Gitā* project was most concerned always to exclude all of these options. In search of securing a method that could rival the natural sciences in objectivity, this subbranch of philology arrived not at certain knowledge, but at a discipline in which scientific knowledge basically meant any interpretation authored by a German. To these criticisms, we may add one more, setting out from Schürmann's observation: "The basic goal in these laws is the transition from the particular datum to general propositions. That is, in a word, induction."¹⁵² The existence of a plurality of German *Gitās* shows that no such general propositions concerning the poem were discovered, and the particular data remain idiosyncratic, depending upon the views of the respective scholar. Mill, who argued with Comte against the inclusion of phrenology among the sciences, would be astonished at the claim that the philology practiced by the Indologists could lay claim to *any* science, much less an objective, rigorous one.

If Mill's views on induction proved too restrictive to ground the work of the majority of Indologists, they might have considered the work of the nineteenth-century British empiricist Herbert Spencer. Philologists fascinated by the history and fate of texts could have found some theoretical grounding in Spencer's work, since he subscribed to positivism but combined it with a theory of social evolution. Although influenced by Comte and therefore in agreement with positivism about the empirical character of scientific knowledge, Spencer rejected Comte's metanarrative of history. Because the subject of the social sciences (human life) is itself in a process of change, knowledge regarding it must also change. In his *A System of Synthetic Philosophy* (1862–92), Spencer rejected the dichotomy between religion and science. There must be between them a "fundamental harmony," for "it is impossible that there should be two orders of truth in absolute and everlasting opposition."¹⁵³ Even though he was a critic of religious doctrine, Spencer advocated a methodological agnosticism. While there is progress and change in both religion (the domain of society's values) and science (the domain of society's knowledge of itself and inventions that serve it), the idea of a universal end is speculative. In Spencer's organicist conception of society, there is growth and development, as well as decline and decay. Thus there is no narrative of the movement from theology-religion to positivism, as in Comte, and religion survives alongside science.¹⁵⁴

In contrast to Spencer, it was very important to the German task of isolating an Āryan identity to *deny* any theory of progress and evolution. In fact, the political and

152. Schürmann, "Methodology of the Social Sciences," 7 (Schürmann is speaking of Mill's laws).

153. Herbert Spencer, *First Principles* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1862), 21.

154. "Assuming, then, that since these two great realities are constituents of the same mind, and respond to different aspects of the same Universe, there must be a fundamental harmony between them, we see good reason to conclude that the most abstract truth contained in Religion and the most abstract truth contained in Science must be the one in which the two coalesce. The largest fact to be found within our mental range must be the one of which we are in search. Uniting these positive and negative poles of human thought, it must be the ultimate fact in our intelligence." *Ibid.*, 24.

intellectual climate suggested ends (Catholicism, theology, religious authority, etc.) and bold new beginnings (Protestantism, study of religions, the cult of the expert, etc.). But these beginnings required a dignified past: Aryan heroes here and also Greek heroes. Thus texts were understood as *corrupted* rather than *enriched*, and the philologist here is like a plastic surgeon who carefully performs rhinoplasties on these texts. We have shown how these re-created texts resonate with the political and cultural aspirations of the scholars themselves. In any event, Spencer's evolutionary theme is not only inconvenient but also too metaphysical for the philologist's taste.

This leaves the Indologists increasingly little room for maneuver. Indologists looking to ground the scientific character of their discipline in empiricism might have considered one more option: the scientific empiricism of Ernst Mach. Mach combined elements of French (Comtean) and British (Humean and Millian) positivism. From Comte, he inherited the former's pragmatic and antimetaphysical stance, but he rejected his absolutism. Further, he differed from Comte in assigning psychological facts as much value as physical ones. These two explain Mach's reluctance to view science independent of human reality. Science provides us models to understand reality but can view its picture neither as final nor as corresponding to a reality that is "out there." The former is at the core of Mach's view of science as a *Weltanschauung* or "worldview," the latter at the core of his debate with Max Planck about the reality of atoms. Mach claimed that contemporary science "does not claim to be a finished view of the world; rather, it is aware of working towards a future view of the world (a future *Weltanschauung*)." The highest philosophy of the scientist consists, in fact, in tolerating an incomplete view of the world and to prefer it to a seemingly complete but actually insufficient theory."¹⁵⁵ Thus, Mach struggled to retain his agnostic view of science, where science was characterized by its radically open, revisable, and syntactic character. Against Planck, who insisted that the atoms the physicist worked with were real, Mach argued that they were but a "convenient fiction." Scientific theories are not true or false; rather, they are workable or unworkable. Grounded in empirical experience, they help us organize data, but while the data remain, theories come and go. Regarding this view of science as a means of rendering reality comprehensible, Schürmann remarks: "This is a '*hodos*' of sense data; a *hodos* to which the '*meta*-' discourse has become rather modest."¹⁵⁶ That is, 'methodology,' the discourse about the proper triad to follow, no longer claims to say anything about reality."¹⁵⁷

But in contrast to Mach's modest, agnostic, and self-negating notion of method as a *hodos* or "path," Indologists viewed method as the meaning of scholarship itself. As the writings of Oldenberg demonstrated, German Indologists did not just see themselves as collecting empirical data nor was their goal to simply provide

155. Cited in Richard von Mises, "Ernst Mach and the Empiricist Conception of Science," in *Ernst Mach: Physicist and Philosopher*, ed. Robert S. Cohen and Raymond J. Seeger (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 2010), 267. Mises does not give the source.

156. Schürmann is playing with the etymology of the word *method*. The Greek *hodos* means "road" or "path"; *method* implies a certain path. This etymology is not merely for effect; Heidegger places great emphasis on thinking as being "on the way" and prefaces his collected works with a Spartan utterance: "Wege nicht Werke."

157. Schürmann, "Methodology of the Social Sciences," 8.

hypothetical models (which were to be tested against the data and discarded if found to be unworkable). Indeed, in contrast to Mach's emphasis on the role of data in any scientific theory, Oldenberg had explicitly assigned the task of data gathering (which he regarded as inferior) to English and French scholars. German Indologists, meanwhile, were assigned the task of making sense of this information. Unfortunately, Indologists chose not to take a page out of their compatriot Ernst Mach's book: instead of the theory being revised to fit with the available data, it was always the data that was shaped to fit the theory. Instead of reading texts in a spirit of humility and hermeneutic openness, they went to work with chisels and axes.¹⁵⁸ "With crude powerful tools, with the axe, we hew our way through the forests of as yet untouched problems and, ever and ever again, we are rewarded by the opening up of new horizons," exulted Oldenberg.¹⁵⁹ The German Indologist is not only committed to *Realpolitik* but also vociferously insistent on the *superiority and sovereignty* of his method. He has many facts to expose and some myths to present as facts (see Holtzmann's "Buddhist hypothesis" in the second chapter for a good example). Thus while Mach's "militant anti-dogmatism" found acceptance in the United States with Dewey, who "at the same time, wished to obtain 'scientific knowing of society' and dismissed all definite formulae about society,"¹⁶⁰ within his homeland, his modest proposals found no takers among the Indologists. Even though they equated scientificity, *Wissenschaftlichkeit*, with the bracketing of subjectivity and the reliance upon empirical observation, in practice they were never able to live up these ideals. "I have thereby already touched upon a peculiarity of these investigations concerning which I may not keep silent," wrote Oldenberg. "That precisely in them the subjectivity of the observer, his scientific temperament, tends to play an especially dangerous role. We see, on the one side, researchers who with hasty confidence throw themselves upon every similarity between distant manifestations and constantly scent the track of historical relationships. The phlegmatic types, who stand opposed to these sanguine ones, are also not lacking. They let a timid mistrust rule everywhere where they are asked to take a gamble, to make a leap or even just to take a step from the one cultural sphere in the direction of the other."¹⁶¹

The first of the three aspects we identified as underwriting the scientific character of Indology—positivism—led to a dead end. The second—historicism—led to a wrong turn. The third has now led us to a missed opportunity. Empiricism is only viable as a fundament for Indology if it turns to milder forms of empiricism such as Spencer's or Mach's empiricism.

158. For the reference to the Indologist, who with his "chisel" gives "form" to the "block... of uncut stone," see Oldenberg, "Ueber Sanskritforschung," 386.

159. Oldenberg, "Indische und klassische Philologie," 3.

160. Schürmann, "Methodology of the Social Sciences," 8.

161. Oldenberg, "Die Erforschung der altindischen Religionen," 18.

CRITICISMS OF THE POSITIVISTIC NOTION OF TRUTH

We have already seen that the notion of science implicit in the three great scientific movements of the nineteenth century—positivism, historicism, and empiricism—is insufficient to ground the scientific character of Indology. This makes the Indologists' claims to being scientific, *wissenschaftlich*, increasingly problematic. In spite of their attempts to claim a place within a "world of the human sciences [Geisteswissenschaften] [i.e., a world] that is... a *purposeless* [zweckfreie] world of human sciences,"¹⁶² they were not able to convincingly demonstrate wherein their scientificity lay. Crucially, while upholding a positivist conception of science, they seemed unaware of the criticisms the positivist notion of truth had been subject to in twentieth-century Continental philosophy. We shall now look specifically at three criticisms of positivism raised by Schürmann. These three criticisms may be summarized as: (1) verification, (2) prediction, and (3) a hidden metaphysics. The problems with verification are stated succinctly by Schürmann as follows:

It is not so simple to say what verification is. Traditionally, the answer is: "sense experience." That does not solve much. Indeed, *whose* experience are we talking about? Scientific language would be reduced ultimately to observational statements (see Carnap's article). But neither the "who" nor the "fact" are clear: what is the fact that an observation statement reports? Is it a subjective experience about a physical object? Is it a pure picture of that object? Subjectivity, it appears, cannot be entirely disentangled from verification. This is already the case in the natural sciences but even more so in the social and human sciences. There it is quite clear that the observer contributes a lot to what he observes.¹⁶³

Schürmann's point is glaringly obvious in the case of the text-historical approach to Indian texts, especially the Mahābhārata and, even more so, the Gītā. There is absolutely no conclusive evidence that there was such a war, and there are no texts outside the epic to corroborate that there was such a war. Even if there was such a war, there is no agreement about who the participants of the war actually were: they range from the text's own suggestion (a titanomachy) to the German Indologist's fantasy (a religious war, involving Buddha himself!). External verification being impossible, the interpreters we have been discussing resort to internal verification. But thesis and evidence appear in a vicious circle: the proof of Brahmanic mischief is precisely what *the Indologist asserts, based on this text, as an alleged Brahmanic redaction!* The text becomes both the thesis and evidence. These very basic logical errors go unnoticed because, like fish to water, these scholars have fully taken for granted their thesis of corrupt, mendacious Brahmins as a self-evident truism. Surely there is mischief on the part of any faction of society claiming to have the absolutely correct interpretations of texts and claiming power in the name of truth. But this accusation is as true of German Indology as of any other elite group. Further, the enormous

162. Slaje, "Was ist und welchem Zwecke dient die Indologie," 311 (italics in original).

163. Schürmann, "Methodology of the Social Sciences," 15.

generalization of “Brahmans” is a shoddy one: it does not make room for the fierce debates that must necessarily occur in any intellectual milieu. Let us imagine that a faction of Brahmans attempts tampering with a canonical text: would the Indologist have us imagine that the Brahmans, already characterized by him as greedy and hungry for power at any cost, allowed it? Were there councils of Brahmans agreeing on synoptic views to interpolate? Were those who disagreed murdered? Such questions do not bother the Indologist, in whose view all Brahmans are alike.

There is the further point of the distinction between the natural and the human sciences:

Namely, that in the latter we are somehow involved. It is to say that as *observers* in the human sciences we introduce what one may call our own “horizon” of understanding. The hermeneuticians speak therefore of a “fusion of horizons” between observer and observed. This certainly makes the quest for elementary statements that are like the facts, impossible.¹⁶⁴

Schürmann, of course, is referring here to the *Horizontverschmelzung* elaborated by Gadamer in his seminal work *Truth and Method*. Gadamer’s interpretation necessarily leads to a dialogical situation, where the exclusionary gestures and self-important postures of German Indologists become no longer tenable. But failing such a development, German Indology remains trapped by its positivist inheritance. Once again, Schürmann is instructive as to what happens once one rejects opening oneself up in the direction of a philosophical hermeneutics:

In the language of the positivists themselves: is it ever possible to translate a person’s internal experience into a statement about physical objects, or vice versa? Does the subject not “contribute” something that makes the fact forever elusive? This is more than merely the problem of solipsism, of private language, of the necessarily non-public character of experience. It has to do with the very process of obtaining knowledge: whether private or public, statements always involve the speaker, hence interpretation.¹⁶⁵

The German scholars whose work we examined in the preceding chapter, however, could not agree even on a basic text of the *Gītā*. Each proposed his own text based on his reaction to the *Gītā*. What is this but the most extreme and utter solipsism? To be sure, they were prepared to open themselves up a little to each other, as one can see from the Garbe-Jacobi debate. But this debate ended without leading to any conclusion because the two participants in it were not capable of a genuine dialogue. As Garbe curtly noted in his final response: “It is naturally not possible to continue the discussion in DLZ in the current manner; furthermore, a continuation of it would also not have the success that one of us would convince the other of the incorrectness

164. Ibid. (Schürmann’s emphasis).

165. Ibid.

of his stand-point.”¹⁶⁶ Schürmann’s comments regarding how extreme verificationism leads to the problem of solipsism, of private language, and of the necessarily nonpublic character of experience are thus pertinent here. Far from the scientists they so wish to emulate, German Indologists begin to look like the fabled blind men of India, each touching a different part of the Gītā elephant. What is the solution? Schürmann offers the following answer:

Each person’s experience, each age’s presuppositions are interpretation. Each person’s experience, each age’s presuppositions are different from the allegedly objectively real world. But to say that verification statements mean one thing to one person and another to others, amounts to eliminating the very possibility of the verification principle. Hence my first thesis: no verification without interpretation.¹⁶⁷

Either dilute the verification principle by acknowledging its interpretive dimension (and then attempt to reinstate the intersubjective dimension of truth via a theory of communication) or watch the verification principle erode away anyway. But since the former meant opening oneself up in the direction of a truly dialogical, international situation, where the truth of a statement is open to question and is not simply accepted because it is made by a German, German Indology was unable to accept this solution.

German Indology fails verification as a test of its scientific character, but it is no more successful when it comes to the second test of a positivist methodology: prediction.

Previewing or prediction is the area where positivism is supposed to have the greatest impact. As Mary Pickering notes in her biography, one of Comte’s cherished aphorisms was “*from science comes prediction; from prediction comes action.*”¹⁶⁸ “The aim of each science was therefore prediction. Prediction to Comte meant going not only from the present to the future but also from the known to the unknown.”¹⁶⁹ In fact, in the second volume of his *Cours*, Comte goes so far as to say: “All sciences aim at prevision [toute science a pour but la prévoyance].”¹⁷⁰ German Indologists wishing to defend the scientific value of their work might have argued that their work nonetheless has value in terms of being able to foresee (and perhaps forestall) future developments in India. But what is it exactly that the positivist methodology in Indology is supposed to predict? Future Āryan incursions? The gradual darkening of the Northern races under the influence of India’s clime? Or are they supposed to predict the loss and degradation Indian texts would allegedly suffer if no German Indologists were around to preserve and safeguard them?

Even if the Indologists were to accept a weak form of the prediction hypothesis, where the law is useful and retained as long as it produces predictions accepted by

166. Garbe, “Mein Schlusswort zum Bhagavadgītā-Problem,” 604.

167. Schürmann, “Methodology of the Social Sciences,” 15–16.

168. Cited and translated in Mary Pickering, *Comte: An Intellectual Biography*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 566 (Pickering’s italics); the Lenzer edition has it as: “From science comes prevision; from prevision comes action.” Comte, *Auguste Comte and Positivism*, 88.

169. Pickering, *Comte*, 566.

170. Comte, *Auguste Comte and Positivism*, 56.

German Indologists alone rather than by general consensus (as the strict definition of “successful prediction” requires), there is still a problem. We might imagine a situation in which German Indologists sat around in circles and narrated stories of Brahmanic corruption and mendacity; these could even take the form of predictions to which everyone assembled gave their assent, hence ensuring the “predicative success” criterion was met. But even then, they would at best be verifying empirical statements but *precisely not the law* from which their discipline draws its character of a science. Schürmann writes:

Prediction is based on laws. How is a statement like the following to be verified: “When a moving body is not acted upon by external forces, its direction will remain constant”? It is one thing to verify a statement like: “There is a parade on 5th Avenue.” It is another thing to verify these laws on which prediction is based. Scientific statements imply an indefinite number of cases. If the positivist is consistent, then any single case in the future can falsify such a statement. What would be needed is a fact that can verify *now* the future truth of that general scientific statement—obviously an impossibility. Thus the problem that the positivist faces is whether to consider any scientific statement meaningful. It would be so—according to the verification principle—if it could be verified. But can an experiment, or my experience, tell me anything about the future? By rigorous application of the verification principle, a statement of prediction has to be meaningless.¹⁷¹

What can be done? If the law is to govern an indefinite and infinite number of cases in the future, then how can a statement such as “Brahmans always corrupt texts” be verified here and now? Clearly, when posed in this way, the statement loses its appearance of a positivist, empirically verifiable claim and becomes the expression of a religious point of view. But even religious points of view must be capable of being subject to criteria for validity, if they are not to be dogmatic claims. Here is where the notion of falsifiability or defeasibility comes in.

In Schürmann’s view, the only person to draw the correct conclusion from the impossibility of prediction as a criterion for a scientific theory was Popper:

More hardcore positivists stick to the axiom: if a statement is not conclusively verifiable in principle, then it is not a proposition, i.e. meaningful. Positivists who did not want to abandon the verification principle have therefore proposed a compromise: there are strong and weak forms of the verification principle. The weak form says that statements must be verifiable “in principle”; they must be ‘capable’ of verification. They must be confirmed in some degree by the observation of something physical. With this concession, the most important point of the theory, the strict adherence to data of experience, suffers a defeat. It is Popper who has drawn the appropriate consequence, namely the trial-character of statements. As far as the

171. Schürmann, “Methodology of the Social Sciences,” 16.

instrumentation is concerned, it cannot rest on positive statements alone. It makes the principle of verification impossible.¹⁷²

Following Popper's move from a verification principle to a falsification principle, it becomes a simple matter to test a theory for its scientificity. Scientific statements, according to Popper, are capable of falsification: it suffices to demonstrate just one instance of $\sim p$, to set aside the theory that p . Likewise, it suffices to demonstrate one instance where Brahmins have not corrupted a text to defeat the German view that Brahmins always corrupt texts. But once one does this, two hundred years of German Mahābhārata scholarship collapses like a house of cards, for it is based on the *premise* that there was a militaristic Āryan epic that was later corrupted by Brahmins. What can be done to salvage this legacy? Schürmann writes:

In predictions we are in fact always working with a definite picture of society, which positivism must pretend to set aside. There is always a pre-understanding of social realities at work when predictions are attempted. But the back-and-forth between an anticipated totality and a single present case is precisely one way of describing dialectics. Here, then, it is only dialectics that can solve the problem. Dialectical thinking cannot *oppose* present and future. The future is a possibility, [and,] as such[,] 'real' in the form of an anticipated totality.¹⁷³

Thus, there is always the option that the German Indologist will acknowledge his historical conditioning, that he is working with a definite picture of society, as Schürman puts it. The back-and-forth between the anticipated totality (his assumptions regarding Indian tradition) and the single present case proves to be such that it is susceptible to correction and this precisely in the course of such a back-and-forth. In this case, there can be no opposition between present and future, because the present (the text currently being researched) and the future (the anticipated conclusion) are both open to each other. But this would mean precisely abandoning the artificial walls German Indologists erect between the Indian past and the present, between the pure text and its reception in Indian history, and between themselves and the Indian tradition. One can see the problems this positivistic demand for predictability places on the philologist, especially if he rejects the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of ideas in the culture that produces the texts. The German Indologist does himself no favor by claiming that he has neither expertise nor interest in the evolution of ideas in the commentarial or textual traditions.

Challenged in this way, the Indologist may fall back on the old defense "but the Indians are metaphysical!" Hanneder, for example, compares the pandit to a theologian for whom his subject "will always be more than 'just' a topic for research" and points out that his proficiency in a subject "is often coupled . . . with a certain way of life."¹⁷⁴ But against Hanneder, it is important to note that positivism itself entails a

172. Ibid., 17.

173. Ibid. (Schürmann's emphasis).

174. Hanneder, Review of *The Pandit*, 672.

metaphysics. The criticism of positivism at this level is twofold. One is subtle and yet essential, the other obvious and more empirical. First, the subtle criticism:

Something non-empirical has to be assumed in any form of positivism. Usually, this is the formal realm of logic and math. This already falls outside the verification principle. But the equation “real = empirically verifiable” is itself metaphysical: a claim about the nature of things. The verification principle is itself unverifiable, it is a metaphysical assumption.¹⁷⁵

The second criticism is especially relevant to the study of Indology:

The metaphysical option—since that is what is at stake—can perhaps best be described in reference to language. In so-called observation statements, language supposedly accurately reflects the facts. This is... old hat for philosophers, called the correspondence theory of truth. Except that no previous philosopher had been so uncritical of this theory as the positivists: philosophers had always felt the necessity to go into some pains to establish *how* such correspondence is at all possible. Prior to modernity, it was made possible by the “divine bridge” between the mind and the outside fact; after Descartes and Kant, by the simultaneous formal constitution of subject and object. But in positivism these considerations are explicitly rejected as non-scientific—depriving therefore positivism itself of one of its most solemnly invoked bases. How can we at all circumscribe (demarkate) the realm in which positive knowledge obtains? Only by an act other than such knowledge—“thinking” or rational belief.¹⁷⁶

What are we to make of the claims of the German Sanskritist who places extreme faith in *lexica* rather than in experiences that have defined and shaped the reception of the text? The epic itself, through a series of literary tricks, overcomes this criticism in its narrative and didactics. The most important motif is the erasure of boundaries between reality and textuality: Vyāsa, the author, is also the progenitor of its main characters. Thus reality is first raised to a narrative level, and it is this *narrative* that is narrated by the epic.¹⁷⁷ In so doing, the entire metaphysics of the relationship between spatiotemporal events and language is sublated: the world itself is now a literary creation. Spatiotemporal reality is not the original of which the narrative is a copy, a fact that German Indology misses in order to keep itself relevant. Thus, one may extrapolate an external world from the narrative, but in doing so, a scholar

175. Schürmann, “Methodology of the Social Sciences,” 17.

176. *Ibid.*, 18 (Schürmann’s emphasis).

177. One could object that the outer frames are a late invention. This ignores the contribution of the Sukthankar edition, which demonstrates convincingly, on the basis of the manuscript evidence, the basic contours of the oldest possible archetype. One need not follow the Indologist into his dream world of a Kṣatriya Urepos; it suffices to point out that even in the innermost narrative, the Vaiśampāyana narrative, a dialogic, retelling substructure, endures throughout the epic. Hiltebeitel has profitably read the epic by paying attention to such literary tropes.

ceases to be a scholar and becomes a dreamer. He, too, finds the boundaries between reality and textuality fuzzy, but both reality and textuality are now lost in an extrapolated, imaginary realm. The concrete text at hand is no longer the locus of operation for such a scholar. Other literary tropes abound in a *textual* approach to the reality of Becoming, and this is seen in the way certain set themes (sacrifice, genealogy, war, and cosmology) are wrested from their straightforward functions as descriptions of events and become leitmotifs for certain ideas. Thus the war is not just a war but a sacrifice, a final apocalyptic event in cosmology, and a crisis in genealogy. The epic, through working out the possibilities of various genera of Becoming, thus re-creates a textual universe, and it is this textually created universe that is then subjected to analysis. When one reads the epic as a textbook of ancient history, one finds such perplexities as Aśoka as Duryodhana or Buddha as Aśvatthāman (Holtzmann), a monstrous chaos (Oldenberg), Brahmanical tampering (any one of the Indologists cited), and so on. This is not to say that there is no historical information contained in the text. There are descriptions of landscapes, flora, and fauna, as well as references to other texts, but these are present as simulacra, not as testimonies.

Philosophers in the twentieth century have become suspicious of the grand claims of positivism to being an objective science. As Schürmann notes, "The extreme shortcoming of positivism can be summarized by the observation that general scientific statements are impossible to verify; and mere falsification does not produce knowledge. The metaphysical option for the positivist can only be balanced by a theory of how universals are always involved in any process of observation. Such a theory is precisely transcendental criticism. Thus whereas the tenet of verification made hermeneutics necessary and that of prediction, dialectics, the option for the positive makes something like transcendental philosophy necessary—Kant."¹⁷⁸ Schürmann thus lists three objections to positivism: it is subjectless, it is ahistorical, and it is literally a thoughtless view of the world.¹⁷⁹

178. Schürmann, "Methodology of the Social Sciences," 18.

179. Ibid., 18. These criticisms were already anticipated in the work of Kierkegaard, who, against the philosophy of Hegel drew attention to the problems with Hegel's notion of objective truth. In his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Kierkegaard insisted upon the *subjective nature of truth* against both Hegel and Kant, a criticism that was to be extremely influential for existentialist and twentieth-century Continental philosophies. Against the idea that truth is possessed in the form of propositions, Kierkegaard emphasizes the notions of subjectivity, of interiority, of conscience, and of the situatedness of the existent individual. He argues that speculative thought (principally Hegel's but Kierkegaard's critique is also applicable to historical speculation) forgets the existent individual from whom all thought proceeds. Instead of taking this subjective situatedness into consideration, in speculative thought the subject attempts to rise above his subjective condition and set himself above all history. What holds for Christianity also holds for all theologies, including the theology that has become successful under the name of "German Indology." In the history of thought, Kierkegaard's critique of Hegelian speculative metaphysics was enormously influential. It not only influenced philosophers such as Heidegger and Sartre but also theologians such as Tillich. Kierkegaard's criticism is relevant here because it illustrates the absurdity of a science that attempts to construct objective histories of Indian literature, while leaving out the subjective relationship to this literature. As a first step,

It is partly in response to these criticisms of the positivistic notion of truth that German philosophy in the early twentieth century began to turn away from the natural sciences as a model for the *Geisteswissenschaften*. Knowledge in the humanities could not approximate the methodological ideal of the natural sciences. More important, this ideal was shown to be a false ideal and a misunderstanding of the task of the humanities. But before we study this turn in twentieth-century Continental philosophy, it is important to return one last time to Kant, from whom the “critical project” of Western philosophy—and, by extension, philology—took its inspiration.

KANT’S CRITICAL TURN AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF APRIORISM

Since we began this engagement with the scientific character of Indology in the introduction with a discussion of its “critical” potential, it is only appropriate that, at the end of this engagement, we return to that question. We had begun with the observation that most Indologists seek to justify their work in terms of its critical character. We examined three notions of critique or criticism: critique in the sense of an inquiry that takes a critical stance toward its objects, critique in the strict Kantian sense of a self-reflexive turn to the a priori categories of the understanding through which we organize the contents of experience, and critique in the sense of textual criticism. We found that the last two of these did not apply to Indology and that when Indologists used the terms “critical” or “critique” what they basically meant was any generalized suspicion toward authority. In the meanwhile, it has become clear that this suspicion was not scientifically grounded. Indeed, the texts of the Indologists we studied shows

Kierkegaard distinguishes “historical truth” from “philosophical truth” and “eternal truth.” Since German Indologists explicitly and repeatedly pooch-pooch the notions of philosophical truth and eternal truth, only the first enters consideration here. However, as we have seen the first is not available to the Indologists, who were not interested in historical investigations per se, but in a metanarrative of history. Indeed, even if we accept that Indology was interested in the historical truth, according to Kierkegaard, the subjective individual’s relationship to historical truth cannot be one of noting some datum; it must be one of “inwardness” and “possession.” Further, as Kierkegaard points out, the “existing subjective thinker” is “just as negative as positive, has just as much of the comic as he essentially has of pathos, and is continually in a process of becoming, that is, striving.” In other words, he is as much a part of the process of becoming he seeks to grasp. Finally, there is the problem that of the three sources of knowledge possible from a positivistic perspective—sensation, historical record, and speculation—the first two are ruled out. (Sensation requires that the Indologist be cotemporal with the events he wishes to study, which is impossible in the case of ancient events, and the criterion for historical record is also not met in the case of German Indologists, who possessed no actual archaeological or historical records. Their information was largely derived from texts and hence properly falls in the domain of philosophical knowledge). Further, even where historical knowledge was available, it is, as Kierkegaard notes, at best “approximation-knowledge.” That is to say, we can assume that this inscription can be dated to this period or that such-and-such a king was responsible for it, but our knowledge is at best only an approximation. This leaves us the category of speculation, to which, properly speaking, all Indological knowledge belongs. Such knowledge, of course, is a “phantom,” as Kierkegaard notes.

that their work was justified more often in terms of an *ideology of critique* rather than anything concretely critical about it.

Since this ideology of critique ultimately, if implicitly, derives from Kant (more precisely, from the enormous historical influence of his idea of critical philosophy),¹⁸⁰ we should look at how the critical project of Indology relates to that of Kant. Specifically, we should look to see whether the Indologists may find some epistemological grounding in Kant's idea of a science built up out of a priori propositions. Even though positivism itself failed to account sufficiently for the allegedly scientific character of the discipline, Indologists may maintain that, unlike the commentarial tradition, their science is *presuppositionless*. It begins neither from revealed truths nor from precepts handed down by the tradition. Yet, if the Indologist gathers his data neither from sense experience nor from an exegetical tradition, his science must consist of a priori propositions. It would have to be a strictly logical, deductive enterprise. Indologists could then claim that what guarantees scientificity to Indology is the rational, self-evident character of its truths. These truths can then be used as criteria to discriminate or critically distinguish between the propositions of the tradition, thus fulfilling Indology's promise of offering a critical canon.

But although apriorism initially appears to offer a solution to Indology's problem of self-justification, this solution also runs quickly into problems. To begin with, the notion of the a priori has undergone a significant change since Kant, who, as Schürmann notes, "fixes definitively on the notion of the a priori:"¹⁸¹

A posteriori knowledge is that which has its origin in experience, sense experience. "A priori modes of knowledge are entitled pure when there is no admixture of anything empirical" (KrV Intro, B 3). Thus there are things that we do know a priori, for Kant, i.e. that we know "independently from experience and with clarity and certainty." This is opposed to inductive knowledge in which one can only reach "assumed and comparative universality" (ibid.). In a priori knowledge, on the contrary, we possess modes of knowledge that are universal and necessary.¹⁸²

Kant's genius consists, on the one hand, of his rejection of metaphysics and all dogmatic claims to authority of uncritical knowledge, while on the other hand *rationaly grounding philosophy*. He is able to do this by undertaking a critical rather than an empirical turn. In doing so, he turns to the *subject*, not the *object*, of all sense experience. According to Kant, the mind can only know itself, it can discover only what it projects, and all knowledge outside the domain of the subject's a priori logical constitution is a mere *Herumtappen*.¹⁸³

180. For a good overview of the historical influence of Kant's conception of *Kritik*, see *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, s.v. "Kritik"; see especially pp. 1267–82 ("Der Begriff der K. von Kant bis zur Gegenwart").

181. Schürmann, "Methodology of the Social Sciences," 12.

182. Ibid.

183. That is, a groping or blundering about (especially in the dark). The expression is from the Preface to Kant's *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, where he writes that if the local knowledge provided by the specialized sciences is not ordered and directed

This is where German philology, especially Indology, and German philosophy begin to part ways. For Kant, what is a priori is precisely not what is intuited through sense experience about the external world. Rather, the critical turn, as understood by Kant, implies a turn from the objects of experience to the subjective conditions under which those objects are known. Kant's famous "Copernican turn" marks precisely a turn away from the kind of naïve faith in appearances German Indologists manifest when they argue, as Slaje does in a recent article, that Indology as "the disciplinary effort at knowledge, description, and analysis of the autonomous Indian Logos" must seek "with the help of" "textbook-ready factual knowledge" to "project a general overview" that "views the great and continuous lines of the spiritual world of this culture . . . as they manifest themselves to us."¹⁸⁴

Slaje would receive no sympathy from Kant: the reliance upon mere appearance is precisely what Kant considers uncritical about ancient philosophy.¹⁸⁵ Kant would argue that the method of separating "original" from "later" layers of texts is a criticism in the phenomenon, and thus a *Herumtappen*. It is hardly a "critical enterprise," a term he reserves for the study of the a priori structure of the subject of experience. Further, if we bear in mind that the texts in question are characterized by the fact that they relate to the experience of distant cultures, the philologist's use of the term *critical* loses the force of Kant's scientific project. As for the myths of original Germans in India, a Protestant Enlightenment in India called Buddhism, what would Kant call these but the "Dreams of a Ghost Seer"? In any event, contemporary philologists such as Slaje and Bronkhorst are anxious to bring the textual project out of India and closer to home, and their claims for Enlightenment are based on a confused understanding of European "critical consciousness" on which they wish to base Indology as a rigorous science of their own self, namely, Europe.¹⁸⁶

The parting of ways between philosophy and philology becomes increasingly glaring in Germany. Philosophers in Germany develop from Kant's *critical* philosophy to *phenomenology*. This coincides with German Idealism: Fichte, Hegel, and Schelling. Indologists, on the other hand, still call their work "critical." We raise this point to underscore how German Indology became an isolated, outdated niche in the richer and larger arena of German intellectual life. After Hegel's lectures on history, philologists no longer developed newer intellectual perspectives and approaches. They affected embarrassment with Schopenhauer's Romantic encounter with Indian philosophy, and they ignored the criticisms leveled against philology by Nietzsche. Twentieth-century philosophies, which take a rich textual turn (Arendt: narrative,

through philosophy, it can yield nothing more than "fragmentary groping around and no science [fragmentarisches Herumtappen und keine Wissenschaft]" (7: 120).

184. Walter Slaje, "Was ist und welchem Zwecke dient die Indologie?," 324 (italics added).

185. Whether correctly or incorrectly is a separate matter and is not to be debated here.

186. There is one place where Kant *would* provide room for an encounter with the other in a scientific way, and that is contained in the *Critique of Judgment*. Since no Indologist seems to have availed himself of the *aesthetic* categories contained within it, we leave it out of the discussion.

Gadamer: hermeneutics), are completely ignored. German Indology appears stunted *not* from an Indian perspective (indeed, it is our claim here that Indology had surprisingly little to do with India¹⁸⁷); rather, German Indology is woefully out of step with intellectual currents *within* Germany and, by geographical extension, Europe. That the Enlightenment itself, from which Indology feigns to draw its theoretical ideals, has come under severe criticism either does not bother the Indologist, or he is unaware of it. “We philologists are keepers of the torch of Enlightenment, and guardians against dogmatism,” one hears.¹⁸⁸ In any event, the *practical* aspect of teaching Indians how to read their own texts takes on a tragic note when German Indologists refuse to read contemporary German texts in philosophy and philosophy of science. These texts have, unbeknownst to them, completely eroded their theoretical foundations. In the next section, we shall look at how Continental philosophers, especially *German* philosophers, begin to turn away from the ideal of method as the guarantor and embodiment of scientificity in the humanities, and to turn toward *truth*. In this turn, an engagement with Gadamer is unavoidable.¹⁸⁹

RETHINKING THE SCIENTIFIC CHARACTER OF THE HUMAN SCIENCES

Throughout most of this book, we have inquired into the praxis of text-historical research. Praxis, unlike theory, is circumscribed: thus in place of general claims, we have focused on just one text, the Mahābhārata, and, even more specifically, on the Bhagavadgītā. The temporal focus of research (Gītā interpretations between the two world wars) provided further definition to this study, although the story of this research required us to reach back into its own history to clarify important issues. The central question guiding this study is this: in what sense is text-historical research a science? Our research showed that none of the criteria germane to natural

187. This claim has of course been made before, above all by Inden. See his lucid and persuasive account in Ronald B. Inden, *Imagining India* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000).

188. Bronkhorst’s recent essay “Indology, What Is It Good For?” provides a paradigmatic example of such wishful thinking. He writes: “However, not only do disciplines like Indology need Enlightenment values, Enlightenment values also need disciplines like Indology. The two need each other, their dependence is reciprocal. In other words, if we wish to maintain and strengthen a society in which the values enumerated above have a place, we need to maintain and strengthen disciplines like Indology.” Johannes Bronkhorst, “Indology, What Is It Good For?” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 161, no. 1 (2011): 122.

189. The significance of Gadamer’s work for Indian studies has been evaluated earlier by Richard King, though from another perspective (see his *Orientalism and Religion* cited earlier, esp. chapter 3). King is more interested in using Gadamer to show how every interpretation remains embedded in its historical context; his work is thus a contribution to (the formation of) an anti-essentialist, anti-Orientalist discourse on Indian texts or cultural practices. However, we are more interested here in using Gadamer to critical illuminate Indology’s claim to being part of the human sciences, especially insofar as that claim invokes an understanding of scientific method that the human sciences themselves found problematic and turned away from. The problem for us is not of the colonial or noncolonial nature of Indology, but of its nonscientific nature.

sciences holds for text-historical scholarship: neither self-evident and indisputable hypotheses, nor bracketing of subjective feelings, nor universal methods that can be objectively formulated, nor consensus among experts, nor universal and binding findings, nor pragmatic application, nor even relevance to laypersons—none of these informs this praxis.

For the sake of understanding the praxis, in the preceding sections we traced the theoretical background and the issues surrounding text-historical methods. At least in the case of the *Bhagavadgītā*, we found that some elements of positivism did inform text-historical method, but incompletely so. Beyond positivism, European thought made great advances in theoretical models for inquiry into research in the humanities. Hegel's phenomenology, Marx's dialectics, and Freud's psychoanalytic method are the most dominant examples of useful models into research in social sciences. German Indology remains uninformed of these avenues of intellectual progress. We now propose to turn away from method, suggest that hermeneutics constitutes the best candidate for research into Indological research, and with that conclude this section on theoretical aspects in methodology. In our quest for a reformed, contextually sensitive, and historically appropriate (*zeitgemäße*) Indology, we bring nineteenth- and twentieth-century Indology into a dialogue with one of the major figures of twentieth-century Continental philosophy: Hans-Georg Gadamer.

In the first section of his *Truth and Method*, "The Problem of Method," Gadamer turns his attention to the humanistic tradition in search of nonmethodological avenues to truth. As Weinsheimer describes the situation: "If Gadamer does not begin (or end) with a definition of method but rather proceeds to the history of humanistic alternatives, that is in part because history is itself the alternative to method."¹⁹⁰ Gadamer does not engage with method but finds an alternative to it, because just as "methodical proof calls a halt to history and obviates any further need to consult tradition as a source of knowledge, so also art, philosophy, history—tradition generally—challenge the universality and exhaustiveness of method as the exclusive means whereby knowledge worthy of being called true is disclosed."¹⁹¹ Gadamer is dissatisfied with the sovereignty of method for several reasons.

Method is an inappropriate tool for understanding truth in humanistic tradition. This implies "first, that method lies outside the humanistic tradition. Second, it implies, albeit indirectly, that method, and specifically the method of the natural sciences, has no history: that it sprang full-blown from the heads of Bacon and Descartes and has not altered significantly since then."¹⁹² Rorty works out Gadamer's insight that the domination of method has epistemology as its goal, namely, securing stable foundations of knowledge. If this goal is translated into that subject in the humanities we call philology, it manifests itself in an obsessive, method-driven

190. Joel Weinsheimer, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics: A Reading of Truth and Method* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 1–2.

191. *Ibid.*, 2.

192. *Ibid.*

production of “critical” editions.¹⁹³ This has an unanticipated side effect: *Fremdheit* or alienation. As Gadamer notes,

As the foreignness which the age of mechanics felt towards nature as the natural world has its epistemological expression in the concept of self-consciousness and in the methodologically developed rule of certainty, of “clear and distinct perception,” so also the human sciences of the nineteenth century felt a comparable foreignness to the historical world. The spiritual creations of the past, art and history, no longer belong to the self-evident domain of the present but rather are objects relinquished to research, data from which a past allows itself to be represented.¹⁹⁴

German Indology, to be sure, inverts this relationship and views India’s own unfolding history as meaningless and favors instead an abstractly conceived fetish history: a history of untrustworthy historiography. From this fetish history, numerous constructs were made, such as the decline of the hypermasculine Āryan warrior and Brahmanical wrongdoing. These two fantasies serve as more historically objective to German Indology than the painful and brutal colonizations by Islamic and European forces. Even on this fetish level, Gadamer is still correct: anxieties of *Fremdheit* remain, and the Āryan brotherhood theme, although now defunct and glossed over in silence, is present to assure the German scholar that he is indeed a participant in India’s history, albeit in some unthematized way. Clearly, the German Indologist will neither affirm the Āryan hypothesis nor concede that he is no different from a scholar from France or the United States. But Gadamer is making a much bigger case: “*Fremdheit* consists in the schism between past and present, I and others, self and world. Method derives from this sense of living among objects to which one no longer belongs.”¹⁹⁵ With the rise of a historical *method*, one becomes “stranded in the present.”¹⁹⁶ We may summarize the problems with positivism from a Gadamerian perspective thus:

1. Method is engineered to avoid “stumbling.” This is not a banal point. As Weinsheimer notes, “Mistakes are precluded by method because the

193. A critical edition, when carried out correctly, can have considerable value. It can help clarify the transmission of the text or help attain the oldest state of the text, the so-called archetype. But as we have seen, in the case of German Mahābhārata and Bhagavadgītā scholarship, the Indologists’ editions were not critical editions in the technical sense of the term where it refers to an edition based on systematic *recensio* and genealogical analysis. On the contrary, they elevated prejudices about the tradition to first principles and proceeded to reconstruct the texts on the basis of these subjective impressions. In general, the principles of critical editing are badly understood and the expression itself irresponsibly applied by the majority of German Indological authors, as we discuss in our forthcoming book, *Philology and Criticism: A Guide to Mahābhārata Textual Criticism*. For other examples of inflation in the use of the term, see the recent “critical” edition of the Mokṣopāya, in reality nothing of the kind.

194. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 61.

195. Weinsheimer, *Gadamer’s Hermeneutics*, 4.

196. Peter Fritzsche, *Stranded in the Present: Modern Time and the Melancholy of History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 79.

methodologically controlled mind is aware of its position at all times, knows its origin and the rules that govern its progress; and therefore the end of method is clear and distinct, because the steps of derivation can be retraced, reconstructed and rechecked at will. Truths accidentally known, as irregular and unrepeatable, are therefore essentially unfounded; and what is not founded by method, what is not repeatable, is suspect. Thus, as method becomes the criterion of truth, history (itself essentially unrepeatable) becomes increasingly unnecessary (*WM* 329, *TM* 311).¹⁹⁷

2. The relationship of the method to its practitioners becomes one of Master Method/Slave Scholar. By claiming universality, method gathers under its dominion all that can truly be said to be. "In methodological universalism, there is a distinct exaggeration of sovereignty—of its claim to control what occurs to us and in our world, to control history, and especially to control truth. The ambition of method, in Bacon's words, is to 'extend the empire of man over things,' to 'exercise over the nature of things the authority which properly belongs' to the mind. The peculiar sycophancy of method as Bacon conceives it is that precisely by submitting the mind to the show of things, which Bacon calls the 'humiliation of the human spirit,' the mind achieves dominion."¹⁹⁸ Note that this collusion between knowledge and power goes beyond merely method and applies more generally to epistemology as well. This was worked out in great detail by Foucault¹⁹⁹ and applied specifically to humanistic discourses of the other by Said.²⁰⁰ Pollock exposes these dynamics in the context of German Indology.²⁰¹ Although there are protests against Pollock, a brief glance at the attunement of German Indologists toward Indian scholarly history is sufficient to prove Pollock's point.
3. Scientificity begs the question. Gadamer writes that "even modern historical, and scientific consciousness—is governed by effective-historical determinations, and that beyond any possible knowledge of being so governed. The historically effected consciousness is finite in so radical [a] sense that our being, effected by the whole of our history, essentially far surpasses the knowledge of itself."²⁰² The

197. Weinsheimer, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics*, 7. For a counter to the irreversible universalist pretensions of method in ancient Greek philology, see Vishwa Adluri, *Parmenides, Plato and Mortal Philosophy: Return from Transcendence* (London: Continuum, 2011). In this book, the author has argued that every human life is *singular* and unsumable under linguistic categories. Likewise, in the *Gītā*, Arjuna raises the question of *singulars*, those mortals he can name, whom he loves, and whom he must kill (*Bhagavadgītā* 2.4). Thus this work is aware of the limitations of history and is concerned not with "secure facts" but with *ultimate concerns*. By exploring phenomena such as *erōs*, salvation, initiation, and pedagogy, this work articulates an alternative approach in philology, one that truly takes history in terms of singulars. The alternative, as Gadamer shows, is *not to have a history at all* but simply generalizations and phantasms such as the "cunning Brahman" or the "shrewd Jew."

198. Weinsheimer, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics*, 8.

199. Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* (New York: Vintage, 1980).

200. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979).

201. Pollock, "Deep Orientalism?"

202. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, xxx–xxxi.

mind thus does not account for itself; our scientific objectivity is far from indubitable. Overarching historical determinations manifest as self-evident truths, and this has been proven beyond doubt in the prejudices that handicapped the scholars whose philological work we discussed in the preceding chapters of this work.

These are some of the reasons for Gadamer's dissatisfaction with method-based approaches to humanities. Let us now turn our attention to key sections within *Truth and Method*, where he retrieves an alternative approach to humanities—*philosophical hermeneutics*—by undertaking a critique of Enlightenment.

German Indology closely follows the Enlightenment in forging an irrational suspicion of authority and an exaggerated optimism concerning method into a science. Already in Romanticism, according to Gadamer, there was an implicit and nuanced criticism of Enlightenment. In contrast to the latter's emphasis on rationalism and science, Romanticism valorized the world of myth. This world was supposedly lost to the Enlightenment's desire for scientific progress. However, as Gadamer sees it, Romanticism, even though critical of the Enlightenment, ends up implicitly adopting the very scheme it criticizes, namely, the conquest of myth by *logos*. Romanticism shares "the presupposition of the Enlightenment and only reverses its values, seeking to establish the validity of what is old simply on the fact that it is old: the 'gothic' Middle Ages, the Christian European community of states, the permanent structure of society, but also the simplicity of peasant life and closeness to nature." To this list, Gadamer could have added, had he been aware of German Indology, the "heroic" Āryan past, the knightly deeds of the Kṣatriya warriors, the noble simplicity of their ethical and philosophical outlook, and so on. As a discipline, German Indology is so much a child of its time that Gadamer's philosophical analysis of European *Geistesgeschichte* can be applied one-to-one to understand Indology's historical evolution.

German Indologists, of course, are embarrassed by their Romantic inheritance, and some such as Garbe and Oldenberg made serious efforts to deny it.²⁰³ Even today, most historical accounts by Indologists invoke the scheme of Romantic enthusiasm for India being replaced by a critical, distanced, and self-reflexive science. However, the critical aspects of this science are directed more against what it sees as rival sources of authority (e.g., Brahmins, or native traditions of interpretation) and less against a fundamental premise of Romanticism: this is the tendency toward restoration. This restorative tendency takes the forms of a "tendency to reconstruct the old because it is old, the conscious return to the unconscious, culminating in the recognition of the superior wisdom of the primeval age of myth."²⁰⁴ Thus, the German Indologists surveyed are

203. Garbe, without specifying his precise targets, wrote: "The period, in which the Bhag., because of its sublimity of its thoughts and its language, stimulated nothing but enthusiasm and delight in Europe, are long past. We have—apart from [a few] fantastic theosophists like Franz Hartmann and other such enthusiasts [Schwärmer]—become more sober and critical and do not close our eyes to the obvious failings and weaknesses of the poem." Garbe, *Die Bhagavadgītā*, 11–12. For Oldenberg's criticisms of Schlegel, see Oldenberg, "Ueber Sanskritforschung," 391 (quoted earlier).

204. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 275.

not satisfied with reading the epic *as it exists* or as it is available in any of its manuscripts, irrespective of whether these are nineteenth-century, eighteenth-century, or even fourteenth- or fifteenth-century manuscripts. In the case of the *Gitā*, the text is attested to at least since Śaṅkara's eighth-century commentary, but even this does not satisfy the Indologist. In a reflection of the Romantic longing for the origin, he seeks the *Ur-Gitā*. Meanwhile, the wisdom of later commentators is discarded as interpolation, while one seeks the superior wisdom of a heroic *Āryan* past, which the Indologist fails to realize is but a projection of his own longings.²⁰⁵ The Romantic reversal of the Enlightenment's criteria, as Gadamer notes, ends up actually "perpetuat[ing] the abstract contrast between myth and reason."²⁰⁶ But this is no objection to the Indologist, who, of course, needs this contrast to sustain his self-image. Thus, whereas the Romanticists felt close to the pristine cultures and religions they sought and found in the texts of antiquity, the Indologist paradoxically both longs for the old *and* feels compelled to distance himself from it. Two examples: Holtzmann wanted to both reconstruct the ancient heroic epic with all its bloodlusts and raw passion *and* to fuse this with the enlightened Protestant outlook he found in Buddhism. Hauer likewise sought to find the contours of the old Indo-*Āryan* race and their metaphysics of battle and action but cautioned that importing Indian ideas to Europe would be a problem. The solution, a *wesensgerechte Erforschung*, was supposed to mediate between these contradictory requirements of a past that is valorized both as near to the present and yet utterly unlike it. The German Indologist wanted to exist in two cultures at once: the ancient India of his fantasy *and* his modern present, where he could feel secure of himself as enlightened, progressive, secular, and scientific.

Romanticism critiques historicism by valorizing myth. The Indologist valorizes historicism by discovering myth, paradigmatically present to him in the writings of non-European cultures who were allegedly not critical enough to distinguish between history and myth. In Romanticism, there is a presupposition "of a mysterious darkness in which there was a mythical collective consciousness that preceded all thought." Gadamer finds this presupposition to be "as dogmatic and abstract as that of a state of perfect enlightenment or of absolute knowledge. Primeval wisdom is only the counterimage of 'primeval stupidity.'"²⁰⁷

205. The Indologists *were* able, after a fashion, to find the more original or more ancient texts posited by them. This was only because—to cite Nietzsche's famous metaphor—they had already hidden them behind the proverbial bush. Their scholarship thus had all the apodictic value of Nietzsche's "'Behold, a mammal.'" See Friedrich Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense," trans. Ronald Speirs, in *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, ed. Raymond Geuss and Ronald Speirs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 147; the full passage runs: "If someone hides something behind a bush, looks for it in the same place and then finds it there, his seeking and finding is nothing much to boast about; but this is exactly how things are as far as the seeking and finding of 'truth' within the territory of reason is concerned. If I create the definition of a mammal and then, having inspected a camel, declare, 'Behold, a mammal', then a truth has certainly been brought to light, but it is of limited value, by which I mean that it is anthropomorphic through and through and contains not a single point which could be said to be 'true in itself', really and in a generally valid sense, regardless of mankind."

206. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 275.

207. *Ibid.*, 276.

We have seen throughout this work how German Indologists opposed the “mysterious darkness” of Indian antiquity to the perfectly enlightened self-critical awareness of the German scholars. Weber, in his letter to Raumer, in fact, uses these precise words: “As soon as they [i.e., the Vedas] are unveiled from the mysterious darkness surrounding them till now...and made accessible to all, all the untruths shall be automatically revealed, and this shall, in time, put an end to the sorry plight of religious decadence...of India.”²⁰⁸ But what is remarkable is how this perceived contrast between the primitivism of India and Enlightenment modernity itself directly engenders the critical task, as voiced by Gadamer:

These romantic revaluations give rise to historical science in the nineteenth century.... The great achievements of romanticism—the revival of the past, the discovery of the voices of the peoples in their songs, the collecting of fairy tales and legends, the cultivation of ancient customs, the discovery of the worldviews implicit in languages, the study of the “religious wisdom of India”—all contributed to the rise of historical research, which was slowly, step by step, transformed from intuitive revival into detached historical knowledge. The fact that it was romanticism that gave birth to the historical school confirms that the romantic retrieval of origins is itself based on the Enlightenment. Nineteenth-century historiography is its finest fruit and sees itself precisely as the fulfillment of the Enlightenment, as the last step in the liberation of the mind from the trammels of dogma, the step to objective knowledge of the historical world, which stands on a par with the knowledge of nature achieved by modern science.²⁰⁹

Here, then, is what Gadamer grants as scientific about the human sciences: liberation of the mind from dogma. Rather than question whether this is a sufficient criterion for science, Gadamer rejects the methodology of human sciences and questions the cognitive value of undoing tradition. The Romantic criticism of the Enlightenment is rejected by philologists, but Gadamer is more sophisticated: he shows that this critique itself is a continuation of the program Enlightenment sets up for itself. To overcome Enlightenment and restore tradition, Gadamer rejects the view that all tradition can be reduced to prejudice, and all prejudices ought to be overcome. As he notes, the “overcoming of all prejudices, this global demand of the Enlightenment, will itself prove to be a prejudice.” Thus, a philosophical hermeneutics, according to him, must begin with “removing it [i.e., this prejudice]” as this “opens the way to an appropriate understanding of the finitude which dominates not only our humanity but also our historical consciousness.”²¹⁰ Let us see how this distancing of oneself from the prejudice against all prejudices simultaneously implies a reinstatement of traditional authority.

Gadamer rejects the notion that we can guard against error, especially by simply overworking our notion that traditional knowledge, inasmuch as it is unscientific, is merely prejudice. He traces the Enlightenment’s prejudice against tradition to the “mutually exclusive antithesis between authority and reason.” Enlightenment

208. See his *Letter to Karl Otto von Raumer*, 12.10.1855, cited earlier.

209. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 276–77.

210. *Ibid.*, 277.

consciousness, the “false prepossession in favor of what is old, in favor of authorities, is what has to be fought.” Explicitly linking itself with to the Reformation, the Enlightenment sees itself historically as a continuance of Luther’s task: the struggle against authority. “Neither the doctrinal authority of the pope nor the appeal to tradition can obviate the work of hermeneutics, which can safeguard the reasonable meaning of a text against all imposition.”²¹¹ But exactly what is entailed in the hermeneutic task that is engendered by this break? And in what way does German Indology correctly inherit and interpret this critical inheritance?

A hermeneutic approach to Indian texts such as Gadamer advocates crucially requires the condition of being *open* for these texts. This is not a trivial point, for it means not only that one must be open to the traditional self-understanding of these texts as providing a hermeneutic entrée to them but also that one’s own interpretation must be informed by philosophical and critical reflections on the Enlightenment and its methodological shortcomings. In the case of the Indologists, we see that neither of these conditions was met: not only were the German scholars we have discussed not open to the Indian tradition but they also were not self-conscious of their own tradition. Only in this way could a notion of science, whose origins lay in nineteenth-century Comtean positivism, come to be identified with science tout court, while an entire discipline could come to be constituted on the pretext of offering a postconfessional, postmetaphysical and posttheological access to texts.

But as with any other endeavor constituted on the basis of a repression, this was to exact a price from German Indology. Freud has shown how repression of a trauma exacts a price in the form of a neurotic symptom. In the case of German Indology, the repressed trauma (forgetfulness of its origins in the Neo-Protestantism of the eighteenth century) returned in the form of an exaggerated and overwrought affectation against all forms of religion. Thus scholars such as Hanneder would argue that whereas Indian scholarship was “religious and confessionally bound,” German scholars were the inheritors of the secular Enlightenment, charged with a “defense of the achievements of the Enlightenment against religiously determined views that disguise themselves as science.”²¹² Thus emerged the picture of Indians as beatific yogis on flying carpets,²¹³ whereas the German Indologist constituted himself as a scientist, critic, rationalist, secularist, and defender of the Enlightenment.²¹⁴ What can be done to help these repressed theologians? Once again, Gadamer offers a way out:

This kind of hermeneutics need not lead to the radical critique of religion that we found, for example, in Spinoza. Rather, the possibility of supernatural truth can

211. Ibid., 279.

212. Hanneder, *Marburger Indologie im Umbruch*, 87.

213. For the metaphor and other stereotypes, see *ibid.*, 86.

214. Ibid., 87, and 81–82. Also see the position paper published by *Islamwissenschaftler* (scholars of Islam) in Germany, defending their *Islamwissenschaften* as “scientific” vis-à-vis plans for a program in Islamic Studies at the universities of Osnabrück and Münster. The signatories allege that the latter is a form of “Islamic theology” and is “confessionally bound,” whereas “Islamwissenschaften is a . . . confessionally neutral discipline.” Hanneder is one of five Indologists to sign the document (the others are Heidrun Brückner, Andreas Pohlus, Axel Michaels, and Walter Slaje). “Stellungnahme von Fachvertreterinnen und -vertretern

remain entirely open. Thus especially in the field of German popular philosophy, the Enlightenment limited the claims of reason and acknowledged the authority of Bible and church. We read in Walch, for example, that he distinguishes between the two classes of prejudice—authority and overhastiness—but considers them two extremes, between which it is necessary to find the right middle path, namely a mediation between reason and biblical authority.²¹⁵

Thus the hermeneutic approach as applied to the epic seeks to liberate itself from the faith-reason dichotomy that is misapplied to Indian texts.²¹⁶ This is because, following Gadamer, we can reject the applicability of this scheme—typical of the Enlightenment but nevertheless deeply rooted in Luther²¹⁷—to the texts of those traditions where *rational soteriology was a real possibility, and where the texts explicitly claim to undertake the necessary pedagogy through rational means*. Lessing's parable of God offering a choice between the whole truth in one hand and eternal striving in the other is unthinkable in relation to any reasonable god, and the *value* of rejecting truth for strife sets up an untenable opposition between reason and faith—an opposition that is at the root of all fundamentalism. Yet, it is this choice that is enshrined in Kierkegaard's rejection of Hegel's *Phenomenology* and, as we documented, in the case of Holtzmann. Unable to sustain this either-or of faith and reason, where reason itself is driven by an irrational methodological strife, we find in Gadamer's overcoming of error and fear of prejudice a theoretically robust approach. Thus we reject the text-historical method in full agreement with Gadamer's rejection of Schleiermacher's approach. In taking over the Enlightenment's prejudice against reason, the critic fails to see "that among the prejudices in favor of authorities there might be some that are true—yet this was implied in the concept of authority in the first place." "His [i.e., Schleiermacher's] alteration of the traditional division of prejudices documents the victory of the Enlightenment. Partiality now means only an individual limitation of understanding: 'The one-sided preference for what is close to one's own sphere of ideas.'" This, however, is not the proper meaning of partiality, which can also mean a preference for something based on its merits or on a consideration of it. It is this narrowing down of the concept of partiality that we see at work in German scholars rejecting traditional commentators *because they are traditional*. However, that

der Islamwissenschaft und benachbarter akademischer Disziplinen zur Einrichtung des Faches 'Islamische Studien' an deutschen Universitäten," October 25, 2010 http://www.dmg-web.de/pdf/Stellungnahme_Islamstudien.pdf.

215. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 279.

216. See, for example, Vishwa Adluri, "Frame Narratives and Forked Beginnings: Or, How to Read the Ādiparvan," *Journal of Vaishnava Studies* 19, no. 2 (2011): 143–210; and Vishwa Adluri, "Hermeneutics and Narrative Architecture in the Mahābhārata," in *Ways and Reasons for Thinking about the Mahābhārata as a Whole*, ed. Vishwa Adluri (Pune: Bhandarkar Oriental Institute, 2013), 1–27.

217. See Etienne Gilson, *Reason and Revelation in the Middle Ages* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1963) for a superb and concise elaboration of how reason and faith coexisted in a sophisticated and nuanced relationship to each other throughout the Middle Ages. Anselm's *credo ut intelligam* and *fides quaerens intellectum* and St. Augustine's *crede, ut intelligas* emblematically accuse the faith-reason dichotomy both of historical and religious parochialism, even within Christianity.

the prejudices determining what we think are due to our own partiality is a judgment based on the standpoint of their having been “dissolved and enlightened, and it holds only for unjustified prejudices.” If, however, there are “justified prejudices productive of knowledge,” then the Enlightenment prejudice against prejudice is unjustified and itself antithetical to knowledge.²¹⁸ This is why Gadamer rejects the radical consequences of the Enlightenment as expressed in Schleiermacher’s faith in method as “not tenable.”²¹⁹

In a sense, it is this blind faith in reason that ultimately undoes the Enlightenment in that the Enlightenment succumbs to its own followers. Gadamer notes the pathos of this situation: the Enlightenment means well,²²⁰ but it is misguided in its knee-jerk and extremist iconoclasm.²²¹

The Gadamer reference is relevant because the same iconoclastic rejection of authority guided early German Orientalists. Ever since Hegel, Orientalist scholars had considered Indians to be incapable of history. To these writers, the reception of the Mahābhārata as a theological text offered confirmation of Hegel’s suspicions. India’s lack of historical consciousness, they reasoned, was a direct consequence of spiritual excesses. Indeed, the absence of historical consciousness could be directly attributed to the priestly caste’s need to control and to impose their religion on their naïve followers. This suspicion was at the back of Indologists’ claim that “critical” scholarship into antiquity was *both* a scientific and social desideratum. The primary value of their discipline, as they understood it, was that it provided a check upon authoritarian excesses, protecting Indians, for example, against the depredations of a corrupt and power-hungry clergy. Historical-critical research into Indian texts thus, from the very beginning, carried an ethical imperative along with it. It was charged not only with the task of enabling a *Klärung* (clarification) of Indian texts

218. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 280.

219. *Ibid.*

220. “The Enlightenment’s distinction between faith in authority and using one’s own reason is, in itself, legitimate. If the prestige of authority displaces one’s own judgment, then authority is in fact a source of prejudices. But this does not preclude its being a source of truth, and that is what the Enlightenment failed to see when it denigrated all authority.... In fact the denigration of authority is not the only prejudice established by the Enlightenment. It also distorted the very concept of authority. Based on the Enlightenment conception of reason and freedom, the concept of authority could be viewed as diametrically opposed to reason and freedom: to be, in fact, obedience.” *Ibid.*

221. “But this is not the essence of authority. Admittedly, it is primarily persons that have authority; but the authority of persons is ultimately based not on the subjection and abdication of reason but on an act of acknowledgment and knowledge—the knowledge, namely, that the other is superior to oneself in judgment and insight and that for this reason his judgment takes precedence—i.e., it has priority over one’s own. This is connected with the fact that authority cannot actually be bestowed but is earned, and must be earned if someone is to lay claim to it. It rests on acknowledgment and hence on an act of reason itself which, aware of its own limitations, trusts to the better insight of others. Authority in this sense, properly understood, has nothing to do with blind obedience to commands. Indeed, authority has to do not with obedience but rather with knowledge. It is true that authority implies the capacity to command and be obeyed. But this proceeds only from the authority that a person has.” *Ibid.*, 281.

but also that of an *Aufklärung* (Enlightenment) of the Indian mind.²²² But as laudable as the Orientalists' attempts to induce a second Reformation in India were, they overlooked a crucial point:

Even the anonymous and impersonal authority of a superior which derives from his office is not ultimately based on this hierarchy, but is what makes it possible. Here also its true basis is an act of freedom and reason that grants the authority of a superior fundamentally because he has a wider view of things or is better informed—i.e., once again, because he knows more. Thus, acknowledging authority is always connected with the idea that what the authority says is not irrational and arbitrary but can, in principle, be discovered to be true. This is the essence of the authority claimed by the teacher, the superior, the expert.²²³

In their overly hasty post-Luther, post-Reformation, and post-Enlightenment rejection of authority, the German Orientalists clearly forgot this legitimate aspect of tradition. A resurrection of bloodthirsty Āryanism seemed preferable to them than to countenance legitimate authority. Even if we accept the equation of all priestly authority with mendacity, one would still have to ask: is Āryan primitivism preferable to clerical authority? Is it therefore not worthwhile, illuminating, and intelligent to look at the Indian tradition when interpreting Indian texts rather than launch a campaign of general vilification in the name of a global method and an indefensible conception of science? Merely attacking Brahmins with the same intensity, for the same reasons, in the same language, and for the same religious motivations as attacking Catholics in Germany is not science; it is simply self-righteous self-enrichment at the price of cultural genocide.

But what part of tradition ought we preserve? In the case of Indian epic, the *pedagogical function* stands out. These texts are less a record of power than of philosophy, and no matter how incestuous that may seem to our cynical ears, we must begin our journey into a text on its own terms. Much would seem to us foreign, bizarre, or irrational. The text is aware of the contingencies of time and worldview and endeavors to use a sophisticated set of tools to overcome and compensate for "truth leakage" across history. It does so by selecting its subject matter carefully, by alternating narrative with didactics, through riddle and humor and enigmatic symbols, and by opposing

222. See the statements by Goldstücker, already cited throughout this book. And see also Oldenberg's remark in his "Ueber Sanskritforschung" that "it was not easy [for European scholars] to defeat the opposing Brahmanic prejudices [and gain a knowledge of Sanskrit texts]; to master the hindrances that arose from the unnature [Unnatur] of the indescribably sophistic and twisted grammatical system of the Indians entailed great difficulties, which, however, could be overcome with some patience." Oldenberg footnoted the words "indescribably sophistic and twisted grammatical system" with the passage: "The original lament of the missionary Paulinus S. Bartholomaeo is well known: the Devil, in his wondrous cunning, has spurred on the Brahman philosophers to invent a language that is simultaneously so rich and so convoluted that their secrets are hidden not only from the people [at large], but also from their own students." Ibid., 388, n. 3.

223. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 281.

various ideas, worldviews, and philosophies in a literary construction. This literary construction itself has an architectonic that is both stylistic and thematic: composed of circular and repetitive patterns, returning motifs always slightly modified and juxtaposed with each other in thoughtful ways, and interspersed with hermeneutic clues ranging from key experiences (initiation, sacrifice) to large narrative constructs (genealogy, cosmology, war). The most profound intellectual experiences are the result of such “stumbling” through the epic, rather than of clinical methodology. To appreciate these avenues, one can glance at the tradition that created and continues to use these texts profitably.²²⁴

Traditionalism should not be misunderstood as a bond of naïveté. It is true, as Gadamer remarks, that the concept of tradition has “become no less ambiguous than that of authority, and for the same reason—namely that what determines the romantic understanding of tradition is its abstract opposition to the principle of enlightenment.”²²⁵ But, as we have argued throughout this work, there is a way of looking at tradition that does not play on this abstract opposition. That tradition is some kind of monolithic, unchanging entity is a false idea, one that is engendered by Romanticism. Gadamer notes: “Romanticism conceives of tradition as an antithesis to the freedom of reason and regards it as something historically given, like nature. And whether one wants to be revolutionary and oppose it or preserve it, tradition is still viewed as the abstract opposite of free self-determination, since its validity does not require any reasons but conditions us without our questioning it. . . .”²²⁶ The majority of German Indologists, however, accepted this understanding of tradition. Some, like Oldenberg, went so far as to criticize those (like the British Orientalists Jones and Wilkins) who did not share this iconoclastic attitude toward tradition. Instead of looking at what in tradition was valid and could be reused and made the basis for further researches, German Indologists cast away all tradition. Not only tradition, but also traditionally trained scholars were reviled as uncritical and untrustworthy.²²⁷ Nowhere does the German scholars’ rootedness in specific historical circumstances become more evident than in this difference from their British and Continental colleagues. German scholars, however, did not stop to ask themselves why tradition appeared so inimical to them. In their headlong rush to take their place

224. Gadamer thematizes these insights clearly: “Here we can find support in the romantic criticism of the Enlightenment; for there is one form of authority particularly defended by romanticism, namely tradition. That which has been sanctioned by tradition and custom has an authority that is nameless, and our finite historical being is marked by the fact that the authority of what has been handed down to us—and not just what is clearly grounded—always has power over our attitudes and behavior. . . . And in fact it is to romanticism that we owe this correction of the Enlightenment: that tradition has a justification that lies beyond rational grounding and in large measure determines our institutions and attitudes. What makes classical ethics superior to modern moral philosophy is that it grounds the transition from ethics to ‘politics,’ the art of right legislation, on the indispensability of tradition. By comparison, the modern Enlightenment is abstract and revolutionary.” *Ibid.*, 281–82.

225. *Ibid.*, 282.

226. *Ibid.*

227. For examples, see the articles and essays by Hanneder, already cited in this work.

as scientists alongside their philologist colleagues, they simply accepted the abstract opposition of tradition and reason as set up by Romanticism. Indeed, it became one of the foundational gestures of the discipline. Thus, from Roth to Oldenberg and from Slaje to Hanneder, when asked what Indology was, they responded with a clarification of *what it was not*: it was not the tradition. But merely not being traditional is no argument for a discipline; it is only an argument for the value of something where tradition has been equated with the nonrational or the antirational.

Gadamer too rejects the idea of an “unconditional antithesis” between tradition and reason. “However problematical the conscious restoration of old or the creation of new traditions may be, the romantic faith in the ‘growth of tradition,’ before which all reason must remain silent, is fundamentally like the Enlightenment, and just as prejudiced.” Indeed, he points to an element of “freedom and history” within tradition itself: “Even the most genuine and pure tradition does not persist because of the inertia of what once existed. It needs to be affirmed, embraced, cultivated.” But lest Indologists such as Hanneder and Slaje oppose that this is precisely to surrender to the forces of irrationalism and conservatism against the scientific spirit of Europe, Gadamer points out that “preservation . . . is active in all historical change.” Indeed, he challenges the dichotomy between conservatism and reason: for him, “preservation is an act of reason, though an inconspicuous one.” Precisely because the reason inherent in preservation is inconspicuous, well bred, and moderate and does not engage in the kind of book burning Slaje and Hanneder advocate, “only innovation and planning appear to be the result of reason.” But, as Gadamer notes, “this is an illusion.”²²⁸ “Even where life changes violently, as in ages of revolution, far more of the old is preserved in the supposed transformation of everything than anyone knows, and it combines with the new to create a new value.” For this reason preservation represents “as much a freely chosen action as . . . revolution and renewal. . . . Both the Enlightenment’s critique of tradition and the romantic rehabilitation of it lag behind their true historical being.”²²⁹

Gadamer wishes to apply these insights—the use of enabling prejudice, the pedagogical function of authority, and the intellectual horizon of tradition—to critique method in humanities and to recommend the sophisticated art of hermeneutics. He notes:

These thoughts raise the question of whether in the hermeneutics of the human sciences the element of tradition should not be given its full value. Research in the human sciences cannot regard itself as in an absolute antithesis to the way in which we, as historical beings, relate to the past. At any rate, our usual relationship to the past is not characterized by distancing and freeing ourselves from tradition. Rather, we are always situated within traditions, and this is no objectifying process—i.e., we do not conceive of what tradition says as something other, something alien. It is always part of us, a model or exemplar, a kind of cognizance that our later historical

228. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 282.

229. *Ibid.*, 282–83.

judgment would hardly regard as a kind of knowledge but as the most ingenuous affinity with tradition.²³⁰

Gadamer's critique of the equation of historicism and historical method with objectivity tout court is especially germane to our context. With him, we might ask: "has the rise of historical consciousness really divorced our scholarship from this natural relation to the past? Does understanding in the human sciences understand itself correctly when it relegates the whole of its own historicity to the position of prejudices from which we must free ourselves? Or does 'unprejudiced scholarship' share more than it realizes with that naïve openness and reflection in which traditions live and the past is present?" Obviously, these are questions Indology is not well placed to ask or answer, since it constitutes itself via a repression of its history. But even if we grant it diplomatic immunity from history, the question still remains: how can Indology claim to carry out historical research when it evades the elementary conditions of historical being? As Gadamer pertinently notes, "understanding in the human sciences," too, shares "one fundamental condition with the life of tradition," that is, "it lets itself be addressed by tradition."²³¹ "Is it not true of the objects that the human sciences investigate, just as for the contents of tradition, that what they are really about can be experienced only when one is addressed by them?" Gadamer's pregnant formulation makes the crisis of German Indology especially acute and places it before a fundamental decision: either it must acknowledge an inheritance, a debt to German history, or it must accept some connection to the Indian tradition, but there is no such thing as access to the past unmediated by history. From all we have read, we know that the second option is anathema to Indology; to do so would be to accept the validity and binding authority of the *Indewissen* that Oldenberg so decries. Given that Indology has only been able to think of Indians in terms of stereotypes such as flying carpets and yogis, it is unthinkable that it would seriously strive to find some link or access to the Indian tradition. But the first option is no less problematic: since Indology's claim to superiority over the classical Indian tradition has rested on its claim that it alone is not indebted to history—that it alone has transcended the elementary conditions of historical being to attain pure objectivity—it cannot now acknowledge that its perspective, too, is historically conditioned, unless it is willing to accept the problems with past scholarship. But as we know, Indology is far from taking up such a critical relation to its own past. Indeed, even at the price of sheltering Nazis, German Indologists are unwilling or unable to accept a critical reflection on the history of German Indology.²³²

230. Ibid., 283.

231. Ibid., 283.

232. In a recent review, Slaje attacks Jakob Stuchlik's detailed and pertinent study of the Austrian Indologist Erich Frauwallner's involvement in Nazism; see Walter Slaje, Review of *Der arische Ansatz: Erich Frauwallner und der Nationalsozialismus*, by Jakob Stuchlik, *Études Asiatique* 64, no. 2 (2010): 447–62. Slaje's criticisms are polemical, unfounded, and illogical, and provoked the only possible response from the author: in a response to the review published in a subsequent issue of the same journal, Stuchlik accused Slaje of being "motivated by an obvious desire to discredit a critical book about the relationship of a scholar to

Thus, the relevance of Gadamer to Indology is ultimately that he dispels the Enlightenment illusion of an unmediated access to history and, in fact, establishes this elementary historicity as the basic condition of all knowing, even of historical knowledge. Once one grants this historicity, however, the “real fulfillment of the historical task” can no longer be to provide, as Slaje describes it, “manual-ready factual knowledge . . . that brings into view the great and continuous lines of the intellectual world of this culture, exactly as it articulated itself primarily”²³³ but, rather, as Gadamer describes it, “to determine anew the significance of what is examined.”²³⁴ But here, the basic reciprocity inherent in all human cognitive endeavors comes to the fore.

But the significance exists at the beginning of any such research as well as at the end: in choosing the theme to be investigated, awakening the desire to investigate, gaining a new problem. At the beginning of all historical hermeneutics, then, *the abstract antithesis between tradition and historical research, between history and the knowledge of it must be discarded.*²³⁵

This makes the dogmatic separation of “the effect (*Wirkung*) of a living tradition” and the “effect of historical study” characteristic of historicism impossible. Indeed, in Gadamer’s words, the two come together to constitute “a unity of effect,” the analysis of which reveals “only a texture of reciprocal effects.”²³⁶ Equally sobering are his conclusions for historicism:

Hence we would do well not to regard historical consciousness as something radically new—as it seems at first—but as a new element in what has always constituted the human relation to the past. In other words, we have to recognize the element of tradition in historical research and inquire into its hermeneutic productivity.²³⁷

A recognition of the “hermeneutic productivity” of historical research, however, applies not only to the books and ideas through which the West sought to determine itself but also to those through which Western authors sought to determine

National Socialism” and of attempting “over and above the attempt at discrediting the book and its author, to wash the [accused] scholar clean [of Nazism].” Jakob Stuchlik, “Replik auf Walter Slajes Rezension meines Buches,” *Études Asiatique* 65, no. 1 (2011): 287. See also Stuchlik’s concluding remarks: “However, Slaje does no favors for the Frauwallner school to which he belongs and which he believes he must defend in this manner: his engagement places him in the tradition of the questionable and only apparently de-Nazified [scheinental-nazifizierter] Frauwallner and thus confirms the book’s conclusion which pointed out the remarkable contemporary relevance of the problem.” *Ibid.*, 307–8. We discuss yet another member of the Frauwallner school in the next chapter: Frauwallner’s student and direct successor, Ernst Steinkellner.

233. Slaje, “Was ist Indologie?” 324.

234. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 283.

235. *Ibid.*, 283–84 (italics in original).

236. *Ibid.*, 284.

237. *Ibid.*

Indian culture. A critical Indology, then, would recognize, as Gadamer says, “that an element of tradition affects the human sciences despite the methodological purity of their procedures,” and it would not consider this element of tradition a problem that must be eliminated but its “real nature and distinguishing mark.” Thus, for Gadamer, the “hermeneutic turn” in philosophy ultimately marks a renewed turn to man’s finitude after the hubris of the Enlightenment and the easy technological progress of early modernity, for which tradition, faith, and respect for authority—in other words, everything that is, for Gadamer, summed up in the word *phronesis*—appeared to be unnecessary at best and an active hindrance at worst. Precisely because “none of man’s finite historical endeavors can completely erase the traces of this finitude,” it is hubristic to call for an Indology that neither owes anything to humanity nor believes it owes allegiance to tradition.²³⁸ Indology “does not provide therapy, it does not heal, and it does not prognosticate,”²³⁹ but it wants to be well paid nonetheless. But lest Slaje rejoin that Indology belongs to a “European tradition of knowledge [Wissenstradition]” that, according to its “original claim [ursprünglichem Anspruch],” aims at the creation of the “*purposeless* [zweckfreie] world of the human sciences,”²⁴⁰ it is helpful to recall the fundamental distinction between the *Naturwissenschaften* and the *Geisteswissenschaften* as this was developed by us in the preceding sections. Gadamer, too, notes:

It is clear that the human sciences cannot be adequately described in terms of this conception of research and progress. Of course it is possible to write a history of the solution of a problem—e.g., the deciphering of barely legible inscriptions—in which the only interest is in ultimately reaching the final result. Were this not so, it would have been impossible for the human sciences to have borrowed the methodology of the natural ones, as happened in the last century. But what the human sciences share with the natural is only a subordinate element of the work done in the human sciences. . . .²⁴¹

Why is this so? As we demonstrated in the central sections of this chapter, the attempt to construe the scientific character of the human sciences on the model of the natural sciences (as was done in positivism, for example) is to misunderstand their basic character. First and foremost, there is no pure object of research that can be investigated for itself, independent of history and independent of human subjectivity, as in the natural sciences. Further, the attempt to determine the being of historical phenomena in this abstract a priori manner (as was done, for example, in historicism) leads not only to the elision of what is historically specific about them, but also to the veiling of the historical particularity of the researcher. But this historical particularity is merely veiled and not put out of commission. Even as he imagines he has transcended his historical and social context, these continue to influence him in the choice of research object he makes, in the particular questions he raises, and in

238. Ibid.

239. Slaje, “Was ist Indologie?” 321.

240. Ibid., 311 (*italics in original*).

241. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 284.

the kinds of answers that seem germane to him. Finally, although empirical methods have their place, empiricism, and its attendant phenomenon, psychologism, do not get us very far when what is at stake is understanding why people in the past thought as they did. Gadamer is not unaware of these issues, of course. He notes:

Obviously, in the human sciences we cannot speak of an object of research in the same sense as in the natural sciences. . . . [Rather,] historical research is carried along by the historical movement of life itself and cannot be understood teleologically in terms of the object into which it is inquiring. . . . Whereas the object of the natural sciences can be described *idealiter* as what would be known in the perfect knowledge of nature, it is senseless to speak of a perfect knowledge of history, and for this reason it is not possible to speak of an "object in itself" toward which its research is directed.²⁴²

Thus, with Gadamer, we come full circle. We began with the *Wissenschaftsideologie* of the nineteenth century and its resonances in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Indology, especially in the work of Hermann Oldenberg. Via an analysis of Comte's positivism and historicism and of the empiricism of Mill, Spencer, and Mach, we developed an understanding of the problems with the methodological self-understanding of Indology. We demonstrated how, although German Indologists continue to valorize the *wissenschaftliche* character of their work, they are unable to give an account of wherein this scientificity should lie. And finally, we showed how the abstract contrast between tradition and reason is a false contrast—not only because there is an element of tradition that is rational and worth preserving, but also because we are always already claimed by tradition even where we, as the German Indologists did, think to stand entirely on the side of an abstract and ahistorical reason.

But one final point may be made here allied to the criticism of the Enlightenment in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. This is the question of theology. Here, Gadamer allies himself with the Romantic critique of method. Hermeneutics allows us to deal with those aspects of human existence that theology addresses, without thereby signaling a loss of truth or reason. As he notes, the "crisis of historicism" ushered in by the publication of Dilthey's collected works²⁴³ led to a "revival of mythology."²⁴⁴ Gadamer cites the work of Walter F. Otto and Karl Kerényi as examples of this new interest in myth in scholarship. But "the example of mythology is only one among many."²⁴⁵ Gadamer argues that, "in the concrete work of the human sciences,"

242. *Ibid.*, 285.

243. The expression is usually attributed to Ernst Troeltsch, especially his "Die Krisis des Historismus," *Die neue Rundschau* 33 (1922): 572–90 (see also *Der Historismus und seine Probleme* [Tübingen: Mohr, 1922] and *Der Historismus und seine Überwindung* [Berlin: Heise, 1924]), even though notions of a crisis were prevalent in the work of European writers long before Troeltsch. Charles Bambach provides a useful bibliography of the concept and the expression; see his *The Crisis of Historicism*, 4, n. 5, and see also the dissertation by Annette Wittkau, *Historismus: Zur Geschichte des Begriffs und des Problems* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992).

244. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 509–10.

245. *Ibid.*, 510.

it is possible to show “many places where there is the same turning away from a naïve methodologism, the equivalent of which in philosophical reflection is the explicit criticism of historical objectivism or positivism. This development became particularly important where originally normative aspects are combined with science.” Among the many examples we might adduce, two are especially important for Gadamer: theology and jurisprudence. He notes that “theological discussion in recent decades has placed the problem of hermeneutics in the foreground precisely because it has had to combine the heritage of historical theology with new theological and dogmatic departures.”²⁴⁶

The significance of this remark is topical. Theology is gradually overcoming the dichotomy of historical research and philosophical inquiry to once again address pragmatic, social, and existential concerns. Within European philosophy itself, a theological turn has been underway since at least the mid-1950s. Heidegger himself takes a theological turn in his later works, above all in his *Beiträge zur Philosophie*. To him, we also owe the dramatic phrase, “only a God can save us now.”²⁴⁷ This God, however, is no longer the Lutheran *Deus absconditus* for Heidegger, whose insufficiency as a theological conception became all too apparent in the horrors of World War II and in Heidegger’s own brush with Nazism. Heidegger’s statement owes more to Hölderlin and to the Greek gods whose departure Hölderlin was the first to diagnose. Since then, the school of French phenomenology—above all, Jean-Luc Nancy, Jean-François Courtine, and Dominique Janicaud—has been at the forefront of debate over what Heidegger characterizes as the “flight of the gods.” Likewise—again influenced by Heidegger—a fundamental shift in the notion of truth has been underway in Continental thought of the past half century.²⁴⁸ In his lecture course *Parmenides*, Heidegger explicitly sets apart two notions of truth: *alētheia/pseudos* and *verum/falsum* and undertakes a deconstruction of the reigning notion of truth as “correctness.”²⁴⁹ He discusses how the modern notion of truth derives from the Latin notions of *verum* and *falsum* and how both terms originate in a political, legalistic context. In

246. *Ibid.*

247. Martin Heidegger, “Only a God Can Save Us: *Der Spiegel*’s Interview with Martin Heidegger,” trans. Maria Alter and John D. Caputo, *Philosophy Today* 20, no. 4 (1976): 267–84.

248. Even before Heidegger, Nietzsche had problematized the notion of truth as correctness. Refusing to succumb to the pretensions of the philologists, Nietzsche subjected their work to merciless critique. He struggles to include aestheticism, perspectivism, and intoxication as ways of addressing truth in his work. Aphorism 57 of *The Gay Science* (titled “To the Realists”) is typical of this interest: “That mountain over there! That cloud over there! What is ‘real’ about that? Subtract just once the phantasm and the whole human *contribution*, from it, you sober ones! Yes, if you could do *that*! If you could forget your background, your past, your nursery school—all of your humanity and animality! There is no ‘reality’ for us—and not for you either, you sober ones—we are not nearly as strange to one another as you think, and perhaps our good will to transcend drunkenness is just as respectable as your belief that you are altogether *incapable* of drunkenness.” Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, ed. Bernard Williams, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 69.

249. Martin Heidegger, *Parmenides*, trans. André Schuwer and Richard Rojcewicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), see esp. §3. Interestingly, the question of the deconstruction of the notion of truth as “correctness” is posed in the context of a wider question concerning the correct translation of the Greek ἀλήθεια. Thus, Heidegger is well

place of these notions of truth (*veritas, certitudo, rectitudo, iustitia*), Heidegger seeks to retrieve a notion of truth as *alētheia*: truth as the presencing or self-disclosure of Being. This is the sense of truth Heidegger finds was originally present in the Greek *alētheia*, which he translates as “un-concealment” or “dis-closure.” The notion of truth as an un-concealment leads Heidegger to the notion of truth as a happening, an occurrence (*Ereignis*), and it is this eventlike character of truth he is ultimately concerned with recovering. Truth becomes the event of the free self-manifestation of Being, an event that is always ambiguous, for Being can withhold itself or stay away and cannot be reduced to or mastered with our technical means. In his writings from the mid-1930s onward, he becomes increasingly critical of the traditional definition of truth, as well as concepts such as subjectivity, objectivity, Being, the relation of Being to beings, and the history of this relation. Heidegger finds that Western thought has lost its original relationship to the truth: thinking becomes merely technical and, everywhere, man only encounters himself. Over against this literally thoughtless thinking (since the 1969 essay, “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking,” summed up in the concept of “cybernetics”),²⁵⁰ Heidegger is interested in recovering an original experience of the truth, an interest that necessitates a return to the Greeks. Here, he will ultimately find the resources to think of truth more primordially: as the “granting” or “giving” of Being expressed in the German “es gibt.” In contrast, in his *Parmenides* lecture notes, Heidegger rejects the notion of “true” (in the sense of *verum*) as “un-German” in its essence.²⁵¹ Thus, at the end of a two-century-long period, when Europe gave way to the seductions of positive sociology, there is once again a concern with fundamental human questions, which include the question of what it means to be a mortal on this earth.

Here is where a fruitful engagement with Indian texts might begin. Since we began this inquiry into the scientific character of German Indology with a review of German Gītā scholarship, it is only fitting to conclude by taking a look at the Gītā once again. How might the Gītā, beyond the so-called text-historical interpretations of German scholars, enter into dialogue with Western philosophy? What might the text have to say about a notion of truth as the free self-manifestation of Being? In the eleventh chapter of the poem, there occurs an unusual exchange between God and mortal. Arjuna, the great warrior hero of the epic, asks to see Kṛṣṇa’s divine, plenipotent form (*rūpam aiśvaram*, 11.3) and Kṛṣṇa responds by revealing his universal form. In van Buitenen’s translation, the verses read:

Pārtha, behold my hundreds and thousands of shapes, of many kinds, divine, in manifold colors and figures. Behold the Ādityas, Vasus, Rudras, Maruts; behold, Bhārata, many marvels that have never been witnessed before. Behold the entire

aware of the problems with merely lexical definitions and would have no sympathy for the German Indologists who think they merely look up Sanskrit words in their lexica, when in fact the greater task is for us to translate ourselves into the world of the speakers of the language.

250. Martin Heidegger, “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking,” in *On Time and Being*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 58.

251. Heidegger, *Parmenides*, 47.

universe with standing and moving creatures centered here in this body of mine.
(Bhagavadgītā 11.5–6)

That this theophanic vision is not simply a supernatural occurrence but one that signifies Being's self-granting or giving is seen from the use of *guhya*m (secret or mystery) and related words and from the fact that Kṛṣṇa has to endow Arjuna with a *divya cakṣuḥ*, or "divine eye," before he can behold the god's self-disclosure. Kṛṣṇa's theophany transposes Arjuna into an ecstasy of vision. He uses the word *paśyāmi* (I see) five times in his description of the god's universal form (in verses 11.15, 16 [twice], 17, 19) and the entire encounter between the two is framed in the language of vision (*dṛṣ-* and *paś-*related words). A comprehensive interpretation of the Gītā's philosophy would take us far afield of the present chapter's concerns, which were simply to point to the inadequacy of German Indology from Western perspectives. But this brief excursus into the poem was necessary to show how the poem's philosophical richness cannot be exhausted in terms of a theory of an original epic situation riddled with later Brahmanic interpolations. It requires philosophical perspectives developed from Plato to Kant and Hegel and from Nietzsche to Heidegger to be able to interpret the poem. Compared with the rich interpretation possible from the perspective of a Heideggerian understanding of truth as *alētheia*, the interpretations of Garbe and Jacobi illustrate the poverty of the text-historical method. By failing either to recognize Nietzsche's criticisms or to keep up with philosophy in Germany, these philological treatises became obsolete. Thus, it is not a matter of opposing the Indian commentarial tradition to Western scholarship but of evaluating the Indologists' work strictly in terms of the standards they themselves appeal to.

Here then, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, is a good point to look back at this history and ask in what way German Indology can be said to contribute to the task of either the sciences or the humanities. The diremption of the text-historical method and the power structures built up on it simultaneously offers an opportunity for the humanities to reclaim and rehabilitate Indian philosophy and literature after Indology.²⁵² The work of scholars such as Sukthankar, Biardeau, Charles Malamoud, and others is testament to the fact that philological rigor can and ought to be combined with philosophical concerns. As attention begins to focus on non-Western philosophies as an essential part of the global humanistic canon,²⁵³ the question is not "whither the humanities?" but "whither humanities after Indology?"

252. See Nicholson, arguing presciently that the near-total disappearance of Indian philosophy from the Western and global philosophical canon is due to an uncritical acceptance of the work of nineteenth-century Orientalists. "We have," writes Nicholson, "for too long been content to repeat these same lists of doctrines, devoid of serious philosophical analysis or historical examination of their claims (such as the time-worn belief that the true Sāṃkhya is atheistic). Such presentations have led readers to conclude that the beliefs of Indian philosophers were derived from private mystical experiences, operating entirely outside the realm of warrant and rational argument. Hence the widespread idea that Indian religions are mystical rather than rational." Nicholson, *Unifying Hinduism*, 11.

253. See Peter K. J. Park's recent book, *Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy: Racism in the Formation of the Modern Canon of Philosophy, 1780–1830* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2013).

Conclusion: Gandhi on the Gītā

Characteristic concepts and patterns of Romantic philosophy and literature are a displaced and reconstituted theology, or else a secularized form of devotional experience, that is, because we still live in what is essentially, although in derivative rather than direct manifestations, a Biblical culture, and readily mistake our hereditary ways of organizing experience for conditions of reality and the universal forms of thought.

M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*

Even where it is spoken by a handful, by the harried remnants of destroyed communities, a language contains within itself the boundless potential of rediscovery, or re-compositions of reality, of articulate dreams, which are known to us as myths, as poetry, as metaphysical conjecture, and the discourse of law.

George Steiner, *After Babel*

At the end of this long and complex book, what lessons can we draw from the diremption of German Indology for the humanities? As we told the story, we necessarily focused on the emergence and institution of Indology around a few central principles (Āryan origins, anti-Brahmanism, the superiority of critical consciousness over the exegetic tradition). But our main aim in this book was not to tell the story of German Indology for its own sake, which in any case is only of historical interest now. As a book about how certain people in the nineteenth or the twentieth century had some strange notions about Indian texts or about the Indian people, this book would only have made a contribution to the history of ideas. Our main aim, however, has been to use Indology as an example to raise certain questions regarding the sociology of the human sciences.

Ultimately, the problems with Indology are not the well known and widely discussed problems of its Orientalism, colonialism, racism, or even of its evangelism. Rather, they concern, among other things, the rise of historicism, the displacement of philosophical concerns from thinking, and the belief in the ability of a technical method to produce truth. As the paradigmatic example of a positivist science that underwent rapid expansion in the nineteenth century and declined almost as rapidly thereafter, Indology offers a perfect example for thinking about the humanities' problematic entanglement in method in the past two centuries.¹

1. This is not to suggest that we reject the idea of method tout court. As we have seen, the real problem with Indology was not its method but that it did not have any. Method has

Faith in the kind of narrow methodological positivism practiced by the Indologists has become unsustainable following the criticisms of scientific method discussed in the last chapter. The failure of the humanities to anticipate or guard against the humanitarian crises of the last century shows that the triumph of method over truth is not merely an academic problem. It is with the aim of raising these questions concerning the relationship of the human sciences to pragmatic and ethical concerns that we embarked upon this long journey.

At the end of our journey, it has become clear that so-called critical research does not offer a viable avenue for future scholarship on Indian literature, thought, or philosophy. Not only was the Indologists' research not critical in the sense that it failed to evolve a sufficiently sophisticated hermeneutics for approaching Indian texts, but it was also not critical in the sense that it was blind to its own historical presuppositions. From Āryan invasions to racial miscegenations and/or Brahmanic corruptions every fantasy could be entertained, provided it remained faithful to a Protestant narrative of religious degeneracy. Basic errors of reasoning could be glossed over, as long as scholars acknowledged the institutional primacy of Indology and aligned themselves with a tradition of pseudocritical research. Indeed, a careful look at the Indologists' reflections on method demonstrated that, for all their claims of practicing an esoteric technical art, their primary concern was to protect an institutional hegemony. Hence the repeated use of the epithet *wissenschaftlich*.

However, when we asked what made German Indologist scholarship *wissenschaftlich*, we were unable to obtain an answer. As we saw in the first three chapters, Indologists were unable to fulfill even basic criteria for a science, and yet they insisted that scientificity (*Wissenschaftlichkeit*) was the hallmark of German scholarship on Indian texts. Indeed, when we pushed the question, we found that their ideas of "science" were gleaned from the most disparate sources. These ideas were not even true of the natural sciences. Apart from nebulous ideas of positivism and empiricism, we found that what the Indologists meant when they claimed that their work was *wissenschaftlich* was that it was historicist. Here, it rapidly became clear that much of their objection to the tradition was in fact theological. They thought that tradition, being ahistorical and/or metaphysical, was enmeshed in theology, yet they could not see that their allegedly historical approach itself entailed a hidden metaphysics. Likewise, their claim to be confessionally neutral turned out to be a hollow one, since with this iconoclastic, antimetaphysical project they were actually fulfilling a central aim of Lutheran theology—its destruction of the *theologia gloriae* of the ancients. Historical-critical research, allegedly theologically neutral, turned out to

its place in research and, where applied judiciously, is indispensable in the humanities as well (in fact, one of Weinsheimer's criticisms of Gadamer is that the ideal of the method he imagines never existed in the natural sciences either. Gadamer's description of the natural sciences exaggerates the contrast between the natural and the human sciences as an element of his rhetoric against the infiltration of the humanities by ideals originally lying outside their sphere). Our criticism here targets Indology's claim to possessing a unique (and superior) method as an element of its rhetorical battle against the commentarial tradition.

have a major role to play in the delegitimization of all alternative sources of intellectual authority—Jewish, Catholic, Greek or Indian.²

Even a brief glance at European history sufficed to expose those claims. A genealogy of method in Indology demonstrated that the German scholars' origins were not philosophical or scientific, but rather, *theological*. Indeed, as the turn to Gadamer in the concluding sections of the last chapter demonstrated, their equation of tradition with dogmatism was a false one, itself rooted in the Enlightenment prejudice against all prejudices. The "yawning chasm" thus is not—as Myers has it—between history and faith but between *faith* and *faith*.³ On the one hand, there is the scholar's faith in his (historical-critical) method, especially its capacity to disclose a more original meaning to the text (even if it be as banal a one as that priests conjured up the idea of the afterlife to control the populace). On the other, there is faith of a more modest and critical kind, the sense that because individuals are fallible, we should place our trust in tradition rather than the expert.

Thus, at the end we return to the question we started out with: what does it mean to read a myth or a text *philologically*? As we have told the story, we have consistently highlighted the *Rezeptionsgeschichte* of texts as an essential element of their meaning. Our central contention was that in ignoring this history, German Indologists went astray—as self-taught amateurs are likely to do. In advocating a return to tradition, however, we do not mean to suggest that we should return to it uncritically. Rather, as Gadamer has shown, the fundamental hermeneutic problem concerns the problem of *application*. Here, a look at Gandhi's reading of the Bhagavadgītā can help us understand how it is possible to negotiate the various demands of reading a text meaningfully, of taking into consideration its reception, and of making it hermeneutically productive for one's present.

Gandhi, who combines ultimate concern with historical and pragmatic concerns, offers the clearest indication that to read a text philologically ultimately means to read it thoughtfully. He addresses the task of interpretation explicitly in his commentary on verse 3.9 of the Gītā, which he translates as follows: "This world of

2. Historically, the emergence of the critical method coincided with the displacement of the Hebrew Bible from the central position it had held for Western civilization for centuries. This development was not without consequence for the perception of Judaism. As Sheehan remarks, "the German effort to weld together culture and religion was performed on the back of the religious group who, it was thought, evidenced an anthropologically cohesive culture that consistently failed to live up to the normative expectations of culture more generally. Just as the cultural Bible implied that the Hebrew Bible had become what Schleiermacher called a 'mausoleum'—a monument for a dead people—so too was it already clear to Christian scholars that no community was more rigorously excluded from this new cultural ideal of religion than those most slavishly dedicated to this monument, the Jews." Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible*, 234. See also *ibid.*, 236–40 for the attempt to define Judaism as a distinct, autonomous culture (one closer to the cultures of the Orient than to classical Greek, "western" civilization), a development that occurred hand-in-glove with the establishment of a *science* of Jewish cultural identity. An argument could thus be made that German anti-Semitism was part of the wider movement to set apart German culture from all others known as "Orientalism."

3. Myers, *Resisting History*, 4.

men suffers bondage from all action save that which is done for the sake of sacrifice [*yajña*]. To this end, O Kaunteya, perform action without attachment.”⁴ In his commentary on this verse, Gandhi then takes up the question of interpretation as it arises in relation to the term *yajña*. He reads *yajña* in a way that includes his struggle for India’s freedom. *Yajña*, for him, thus does not mean only ritual action in the narrow (traditional) sense, but any just political action. Stietenron and, following him, Malinar have accused Indian commentators of reading their own political and religious ideology into the text. Stietenron, as we have seen, argues that “the analytical thinking of Western scholars trained in historical and philological methodology stood in contrast to the traditional Indian commentators. The latter not only generously harmonized all the disjunctions in the text [i.e., the *Bhagavadgītā*] but, above all, attempted to recognise in particular passages of the text their own philosophical and theological concepts. This was done in order to secure for themselves the divine authority of Kṛṣṇa. In this manner, several philosophical schools developed *Gītā* interpretations of their own—a spectrum that has been further expanded through politically motivated, modern interpretations since the beginning of the Indian independence struggle.”⁵ Stietenron thus includes not only the tradition, but *also and explicitly the Indian independence struggle* in the purview of his criticism of Indian readings. Implicitly, Gandhi also comes in for his share of criticism for contributing to the “politically motivated . . . interpretations” of modernity.

If only matters were so simple. Textual interpretation cannot be pure caprice. Nor can it be rigorously scientific and precisely unearth an original meaning. Let us see how Gandhi’s sensibility not only defeats the naïve, generic, and simplistic criticisms of German Indologists but also actually tells us what it means to read a text. For Gandhi, reading a text never occurs in a vacuum and is never divorced from politics, and the correctness of reading is possible from the intellectual, existential, and—most important—ethical struggles of the reader:

We accept a broad definition of *yajna*. *Yajna* means any activity for the good of others. A man works for the good of others when he spends his body in their service. This should be done in a spirit of dedication to God. The word *yajna* comes from the root *yaj*, which means “to worship,” and we please God by worshipping Him through physical labor. *Laborare est orare*—work is worship.⁶

Although it appears simple, Gandhi’s understanding reveals the issues involved in interpretation and a keen awareness of the situatedness of every interpretation. With a Latin quotation as a segue, Gandhi contextualizes himself and his reader in a dialectical relationship. This relationship involves an exchange (man works for the good of others), but it is important to note that this exchange is not simply material in nature. Work, according to Gandhi, has an ethical component and it is this aspect,

4. Mahadev Desai, trans., *The Bhagavadgītā According to Gandhi* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2009), 39.

5. Stietenron, “Editor’s Introduction,” 6–7.

6. Mahadev Desai, trans., *The Bhagavadgītā According to Gandhi*, 39.

above all, that he is interested in. The exchange is thus not of work for possessions, but of *meanings*. Through work, one endows others' lives with meaning and also one-self *acquires* meaning.

Related to this is the point of control. As Derrida has shown, no author can fully control that which is written. In the play of signifiers that is the text, the authority of writing exceeds the authority of the author. But neither is just any interpretation possible. Those who think that one can capriciously and manipulatively read anything into any text are naïve. The author, the text, and the interpreter are linked as wood, fire, and smoke. Thus, control of the interpretation is not so much domination over the author's lexical and semantic domain, or over the text in its historical primitivity, but a matter of the self-control of the interpreter.

To be sure, German Indologists did understand this, albeit vaguely. They misunderstood self-control not as an active service, but as self-abnegation in the face of the text. A Puritanical spirit underlay their desire to prevent themselves as interpreters from contaminating the text. But this is not enough, as it were. Self-abnegation only suppresses rather than controls a person. There is a kind of negative self-denial going on in the face of the text but not a positive self-mastery. Gandhi highlights his keen awareness of the fact that control primarily means *self-control* and not authority over a populace, whether the readers of a text or the recipients of political doctrine. Concerning the relationship between the author and interpreter, he writes: "As man's beliefs become more enlightened, the meanings which people attach to certain words also become more enlightened. Even if Vyasa had defined the words which he used, we would ask why we should accept the meanings given by him."⁷ At this point, the Indologists would probably like to protest: "but then anything is possible!" But Gandhi is far ahead of the Indologists. He cleverly ties his interpretive strategy firmly to just political action. Noting that "non-cooperation has come to mean much more than we at first intended it to mean,"⁸ he allows that there can be continuous inflation in the use of words *and yet their essential meaning is preserved*. He displays a keen awareness of meanings not only as extended over a range of semantic connotations but also as evolving over time. With the example of noncooperation, he gives the example of a word whose meaning changed even within his own time. What then can we say about the fate of the words intended by Vyāsa? Philology ought to set for itself a goal higher than finding Vyāsa's dictionary. Such a dictionary is, as Gandhi seems to say, (1) impossible, (2) useless, and (3) unjust. On the issue of the injustice of not granting the vitally evolving meaning of words, he writes: "There is no harm in enlarging the meaning of the word *yajna*, even if the new meaning we attach to the term was never in Vyasa's mind. We shall do no injustice to Vyasa's words by expanding their meaning. Sons should enlarge the legacy of their fathers."⁹

The vital process of communication of meaning between an author and a reader is thus neither as rigid as Derrida claims is the case in orality (which he sees as modeled on the commandment of the father to the son) nor as endless as he claims is

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid., 39–40.

the case in writing. It is, rather, a matter of inheritance and its enrichment. Just as a son who obtains a thousand dollars from his father cannot multiply this amount infinitely, but only grow it according to circumstance and possibility, so also with the inheritance and enrichment of meaning. Against the German Indologists' practice of treating texts as dead manipulable objects (which now, qua being quantifiable, enable a "scientific" dealing with them), texts are living entities. It is this life of the *Gītā* and India's textual tradition that Gandhi opposes to the technologized world of the industrial revolution and its domination of India, when he asks: "Why should we object if anyone regarded the spinning wheel with sentiments other than what we seek to create in the people about it?"¹⁰ The example is carefully chosen, for the spinning wheel, of course, is the emblem of Gandhi's resistance to the technologization and mechanistic domination of the industrial revolution in which India was reduced to mere labor. To be sure, the example is not the one a philologist might have chosen, for whom it is more important to go searching for historical meanings. But by choosing a current example, Gandhi frustrates the philologist's search for origins: at most, he can go look for the origins of the spinning wheel, but this origin will not give the true import of the semantic function of the spinning wheel in this situation, *which is what is decisive here*.

From a certain perspective, namely, that of the industrial revolution, the spinning wheel appears a symbol of all that is backward and resists progress. From the point of view of Gandhi's adoption of the spinning wheel, however, it is a symbol of liberation and the triumph of life over machine. We therefore ought not underestimate the significance of Gandhi's unusual choice of a spinning wheel as an example in this context. He is interpreting *yajña* in the most semantically fulfilled manner possible by linking it to the spinning wheel. Kṛṣṇa's private exhortation to Arjuna to act (Bhagavadgītā 2.37–38), never private even within the context of the text, is now brought into maximal understanding whereby the modern oppressed Indian realizes the text.¹¹ Through Gandhi's interpretation, he hears the text (*Hören, akouō*) and listens to the text (*Horchen, hupakouō*). In a strange way, "Vyāsa" finds his tongue thanks to Gandhi's metaphor. Gandhi is fully conscious of what he is doing here, for he says:

It is quite possible that in the future people may see harm in the spinning wheel, may come to think that no one should wear cotton clothes at all, because they do harm. They may, for instance, believe that clothes should be made from fibres extracted from banana leaves.¹²

But this is not a problem. Across the fashions and fads of referents (*Bedeutung*), sense (*Sinn*) survives translation across languages and time. It is only in the short distance

10. Ibid., 40.

11. Kṛṣṇa's exhortation to Arjuna is heard (and successively conveyed) by a series of people: Saṁjaya (who narrates it to Dhṛtarāṣṭra), Vaiśampāyana (who has heard the entire exchange between Saṁjaya and Dhṛtarāṣṭra from his omniscient teacher Vyāsa), and Janamejaya (who hears the entire story of the epic from Vaiśampāyana).

12. Mahadev Desai, trans. *The Bhagavadgītā According to Gandhi*, 40.

between India and Germany that the vital force of authorial speaking and heedful listening is broken. Gandhi concludes emphatically by drawing together his hermeneutic principles into one telling passage:

If people should come to feel that way, anyone who still clings to the spinning wheel would be looked upon as a fool. A wise man, however, will mean by the spinning wheel not an article made of work but any type of work that provides employment to all people. That is also the case with regard to the meaning of the term *yajna*. Thus, we may—and should—attach to it a meaning not intended by Vyasa.¹³

Nothing could be more diametrically opposed to the German Indologists' insistence that no meaning be attached to archaic words in a naïvely apolitical and ahistorical search for the history of meanings of terms. It is precisely by not attaching meanings that the Indologist loses all meaning. (Paradoxically, in this attempt to not attach meanings, he nonetheless ends up attaching meanings of the most disparate and random nature: Āryan incursions, heroic blood-drinking warriors, Ur-Gītās tailored to the "epic situation," and a call to the German people to not lose their "sensitivity for the desires of the nature that creates dispositions and functions."¹⁴) Here, the term *yajña*, in Gandhi's interpretation, carries with it the full vitality of the *raṇayajña* Kṛṣṇa enjoins Arjuna to perform. Through a familial hermeneutic, the interpreter-son serves the author-father and, if we may be allowed to note the irony, also the motherland. This family, of course, is Vyāsa, Gandhi, India.

Gandhi does grant that "because a poet puts a particular truth before the world, it does not necessarily follow that he has known or worked out all its great consequences or that having done so, he is able always to express them fully."¹⁵ But this is not cause for dismay. "In this perhaps lies the greatness of the poem and the poet. A poet's meaning is limitless."¹⁶ The limitlessness Gandhi has in mind, however, is utterly un-Derridean. Gandhi continues to insist on the vital resonance between man and text:

Like man, the meaning of great writings suffers evolution. On examining the history of languages, we notice that the meaning of important words has changed or expanded. This is true of the Gita. The author has himself extended the meanings of some current words. We are able to discover this even on a superficial examination.¹⁷

Thus, in the struggle for independence, Gandhi brings his audience closer to the original text of the Gītā by translating it into the modern idiom. The Gītā in Gandhi's hands becomes an efficacious text designed to pull the distant audience out of pedantic and political dilemmas, even as Kṛṣṇa pulls the warrior Arjuna out of his paralysis.

13. Ibid.

14. Hauer, *Eine indo-arische Metaphysik*, 63.

15. Mahadev Desai, trans. *The Bhagavadgītā According to Gandhi*, xxiii.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid.

What does all this have to do with our central problem here, which concerns the interpretation of texts? We seem to have strayed far afield of philology into the fields of politics, ethics, and national redemption. But as Gandhi points out twice in the introduction, textual interpretation is inseparable from the interpreter's ability to maintain self-control in a political milieu.¹⁸ The task of interpretation, then, is not one of mere academic cleverness, but the responsibility of a life lived. Only when the text evaluates the interpreter, only when the interpreter risks herself in the interpretation is the interpretation just and complete.

Gandhi is not unaware of the opposition between translation and interpretation, but he is fully able to account for it within his hermeneutics. He distances himself from the task of philology and the renderings of other scholars. "They have their own place. But I am not aware of the claim made by the translators for enforcing their meaning of the Gita in their own lives."¹⁹ And yet, Gandhi is qualified: "At the back of my reading there is the claim of an endeavor to enforce the meaning in my own conduct for an unbroken period of forty years."²⁰ Gandhi demands of the interpreter not only lexical knowledge but also a lived experience and an existential verification. He readily acknowledges the limits of his knowledge of Sanskrit. "My knowledge of Sanskrit being very limited, I should not have full confidence in my literal translation. To that extent, therefore, the translation has passed before the eyes of Vinoba, Kaka Kalelkar, Mahadev Desai and Kishorlal Mashruvala."²¹ This insistence on lived experience and practical verification is not an external prejudice Gandhi imports into the text. He quotes the Gītā itself, in which Kṛṣṇa says, "Do not entrust this treasure [i.e., the Gītā] to him who is without sacrifice, without devotion, without the desire for this teaching and who denies Me. On the other hand, those who will give this precious treasure to My devotees will, by the fact of this service, assuredly reach Me. And those who, being free from malice, will with faith absorb this teaching, shall, having attained freedom, live where people of true merit go after death."²²

Preparedness to translate and interpret belong to the man, not to the dictionary alone. Gandhi's interpretive translation is accurate to the spirit and the letter of the Gītā, and, where there is doubt, Gandhi prefers the platform of self-verification over conjecture about irretrievable meanings. It is hard for us to imagine that the philologist be trained in malice-free service and be able to absorb the teaching contained in a text and attain freedom. Here, however, the pretensions of philology to scientific objectivity break down. Truth is never merely fact; whereas the natural scientist, for example, can try to see facts as value-neutral by trying to bracket off subjectivity, the philologist can afford no such luxury. Especially in the case of religious and

18. "This desire does not mean any disrespect to the other renderings, they have their own place. But I am not aware of the claim made by the translators of enforcing their reading of the Gita in their own lives. At the back of my reading there is the claim of an endeavor to enforce the meaning in my own conduct for an unbroken period of forty years." Mahadev Desai, trans. *The Bhagavadgītā According to Gandhi*, xvi.

19. *Ibid.*, xvi.

20. *Ibid.*, xvii.

21. *Ibid.*

22. *Ibid.*, xxiv.

philosophical texts, the righteousness of asserting the word over the spirit can go fearfully astray. Thus Gandhi's forty years of struggle to master the short Gītā text. With these considerations in view, he nevertheless offers his interpretation in the form of a translation. He says that "this rendering is designed for women, the commercial class, the so-called Sudras, and the like, who have little or no literary equipment, who have neither desire to read the Gita in the original, and yet who stand in need of its support."²³ For Gandhi, philological skill stands or falls on ethical praxis, primarily oriented in the form of pedagogical philanthropy. This is not a bizarre twist at all: as we pointed out at the very outset of this book, in its first formulation in Western thought, *philologia* stands in direct contrast to misogyny and misanthropy in Plato's *Phaedo*. Gandhi does not naively think that it is possible to arrive at an original meaning of the text without any prejudice. Rather, Gandhi's sophistication lies in the self-consciousness of his interpretive stance and his clarification of it to the reader. He tells us what he is doing and why. And the what and why are subject to ethical introspection and practice.

In contrast to Gandhi's lucid and self-aware hermeneutics, the Indologists' insistence that the Gītā was interpolated into a war epic turned out to be an external idea imported into the Gītā either through an unwarranted extrapolation from context or through prejudice. As a group, German Indologists all took the war metaphor literally. A text capable of imagining a *viśvarūpa* (Kṛṣṇa's divine, universal form), a supervalent image for phenomenality, was denied by the Indologists freedom to invoke war as a metaphor for the conflictual nature of being in the world. In contrast, Gandhi never wavers from reading the text as a work of art; he refuses to take the war merely as reportage. That this hermeneutic principle was firm in Gandhi's mind is evident:

A study of the Mahabharata gave it added confirmation. I do not regard the Mahabharata as a historical work in the accepted sense. By ascribing to the chief actors superhuman or subhuman origins, the great Vyasa made short work of the history of kings and their peoples. The persons therein described may be historical but the author of the Mahabharata has used them merely to drive home his religious theme.²⁴

In addition to a naïvely historical approach, a prejudice against theology (which itself turned out to have theological roots) skewed German philology from its outset. It was important for Indologists such as Stietencron, Malinar, and Hanneder to oppose the secular aspects of their praxis to the religious, spiritual, or ethical interests of the Indians. As Hanneder notes in his review of Michael Brück's translation of the Gītā,²⁵

23. Ibid., xvi.

24. Ibid., xvii.

25. This more popular edition appeared in the Verlag der Weltreligionen (Library of World Religions) series of a German publisher rather than in an Indological series and was translated by a professor of religious studies (Michael von Brück, chair of religious studies at Ludwig-Maximilian University, Munich), both of which triggered Hanneder's ire.

The fact that Indian religions in the book-trade have wandered out of the scientific domain into that of esoterica is problematic in many respects for the human sciences that are concerned with them. For, it means that there where Indian religions are to be found, science, by nature, no longer has any place. Thereby the human science can no longer fulfill its most visible function, namely, to make available factually supported information and appears socially to be no longer relevant. The consequence is the elimination of [academic] positions [in Indology], through which, however, the imbalance is further strengthened.²⁶

But the counterexample of Gandhi shows that there is a way to read texts meaningfully and purposefully without succumbing either to a pseudoscientific prejudice or opening oneself to the infinity of literary criticism. Unlike the German Indologists, Gandhi does not feel the need to distance himself from the *Gītā*. He avoids both the pitfall of a narrow caste-based reading²⁷ as well as that of a chauvinistic nationalistic reading.²⁸ Gandhi does not see the *Gītā* as belonging exclusively to any one group; indeed, it does not belong to any individual in virtue of his or her national, political, or social identity (German, enlightened, Indologist), but in virtue of whether he or she has made an effort to live his or her life in accordance with it.

This does not mean he is uncritical: he criticizes many aspects of Indian society and tries to bring it in line with what he sees as its enduring and true principles—principles that are contained precisely in its canonical literary and philosophical texts such as the *Bhagavadgītā*. Criticism, however, does not mean a return to antiquity: Gandhi is far from advocating a return to India's Āryan past, as German Indologists did. His views of the *Mahābhārata*'s war images, too, are more sophisticated in that they allow us to understand the *Mahābhārata* in greater totality than the so-called scientific approach does. "The author of the *Mahabharata* has not established the necessity of physical warfare, on the contrary, he has proved its futility. He has made the victors shed tears of sorrow and repentance and left them nothing but

26. Hanneder, Review of *Bhagavad Gita. Der Gesang des Erhabenen*, edited and translated by Michael von Brück.

27. "To the unbiased reader, who here supposes, that around the turn of the century in India some problems of the modern world were already resolved, the sober philologist can unfortunately only oppose that according to the historical context the basic conflict of the *Bhagavadgita* is a special problem of a member of the Indian warrior-caste. For members of the military order, the use of violence in battle belongs to their social and therewith ultimately religious duty and the *Bhagavadgita* is according to the context a detailed justification for this divine social order. The potential deserter is brought with the best arguments to follow his mission pregiven through birth. Only when one removes the episode of the gigantic epic from its military context, do other elements let themselves be emphasized more strongly." *Ibid.*

28. "What will perhaps not be so clear to the reader is that the *Bhagavadgita* originally attains its present stature at the [same] moment in time as it is received in the West. The German reader should therefore not see himself as an ethnologist, who, in amazement, encounters another country and its religion for the first time; rather, he holds here in his hands the result of long discussions and interactions between his own [culture] and Indian culture." *Ibid.*

a legacy of miseries.”²⁹ With this statement, the so-called dogmatic and philosophical interpolations, which provide a commentary and a justification for the war and seek to elaborate on the essentially conflictual nature of all Becoming, become necessary and even primary concerns of the epic rather than later additions.

Finally, Gandhi also has a suitably sophisticated way of accounting for the worldly-metaphysical divide that has proven such a source of irritation to the Indologists. German Indologists, notwithstanding their Protestant background and calling, like to think of themselves as the champions of a worldly, secular, and rationalistic outlook. As we have seen, a basic presupposition for their research was the ability to distinguish between an original warrior epic and a later *bhakti*-colored Brahmanic text in the Mahābhārata. In the case of the Gītā, that color was practically a stain, and they tried several tactics to purge the stain and thus purify the text. Thus, layers were made, archaeological evidence of Kṛṣṇa or Vāsudeva worship was brought in and, when all else failed, the most imaginative of Indologists was prepared to excise the entire Gītā from the epic, including for good measure several chapters along with it.³⁰ However, Gandhi’s interpretation is immune to this criticism of the Indological equivocation of faith and error. He sets aside the question of Kṛṣṇa’s divinity. “Krishna of the Gita is perfection and right knowledge personified; but the picture is imaginary. That does not mean that Krishna, adored of his people, never lived. But perfection is imagined. The idea of perfect incarnation is an aftergrowth.”³¹ This statement is quite radical. Yet, whatever the theogony of the god mythically and historically, the Gītā itself provides such an interpretive course. Kṛṣṇa says that the fool thinks he is another being; he repeats that he is the *ātman* (Self) of all beings.³² A case could be made for Kṛṣṇa as the perfection not only of knowledge but also that of a human or a god. Gandhi prefers to remain on the human level and bring incarnation into a surprising relationship with service. “In Hinduism, incarnation is ascribed to one who has performed some extraordinary service of mankind.”³³ Service, once more, guides Gandhi’s philology: from the human to the divine, service informs the truth of all worldly existence.³⁴ He is clearly aware that the devotional aspects of the Gītā merely buttress the philosophical and ethical knowledge contained therein, for he notes: “In order that knowledge may not run riot, the author of the Gita has insisted on devotion accompanying it and has given it first place. . . . The Gita’s assessment of the devotee’s qualities is similar to that of the sage’s.”³⁵

29. Mahadev Desai, trans. *The Bhagavadgītā According to Gandhi*, xvii.

30. See Simson, “Die Einschaltung der *Bhagavadgītā* im *Bhīṣmaparvan* des *Mahābhārata*,” 159–74.

31. Mahadev Desai, trans., *The Bhagavadgītā According to Gandhi*, xviii.

32. *avyaktam vyaktim āpannam manyante mām abuddhayaḥ | param bhāvam ajānanto māmavyayam anuttamam ||*; Bhagavadgītā 7.24; see also Bhagavadgītā 7.25: *nāhaṁ prakāśaḥ sarvasya yogamāyāsamāvṛtaḥ | mūḍho ’yaṁ nābhijānāti loko mām ajam avyayam ||*.

33. Mahadev Desai, trans., *The Bhagavadgītā According to Gandhi*, xviii.

34. *saṁniyamendriyagrāmaṁ sarvatra samabuddhayaḥ | te prāṇnuvanti mām eva sarvabhūtaḥ ratāḥ ||*; Bhagavadgītā 12.4; see also Bhagavadgītā 4.7: *yadā yadā hi dharmasya glānir bhavati bhārata | abhyutthānam adharmasya tadātmānam sṛjāmy aham ||*.

35. Mahadev Desai, trans., *The Bhagavadgītā According to Gandhi*, xix.

A look at philology as it was practiced in the history of Indology shows that German Indologists were far from understanding these principles. They placed their faith in a narrow concept of scientific method, which they thought would automatically endow them with the ability to make sense of the text. But the task of interpretation is much more complex. It requires qualities such as patience, sympathy, maturity, and intellectual and personal humility. In contrast, so-called “layers analysis” (*Schichtenanalyse* or, as it is also called, *Textenschichtung*³⁶) takes only a little sophomoric skill. And thus a generation of Indologists from Holtzmann to Malinar undertook their dissections of the text, knowing neither what the text said nor what it actually took to interpret it.

To be sure, this concluding look at Gandhi is not meant to solve all textual problems. Rather, our aim is to outline an alternative to the scientism of Indology. In contrast to the Indologists, who valorize their scientific status even at the expense of humanity,³⁷ we find that reading texts is ultimately a matter of responsibility. It is a matter of that

36. The classic statement of the principles of this method is considered, among Indologists, to be Paul Hacker’s address to the 1961 *Deutscher Orientalistentag* (Congress of German Orientalists); the key passage from this address reads as follows: “From such changes (I mean: inversions of the text, expansions, interpolations and even individual word variants) one can at times practically read off intellectual-historical [geistesgeschichtliche] processes. And since we for the most part lack direct historical [geschichtliche] evidence, textual history [Textgeschichte] or, speaking more generally, the *method of comparing the multiple transmissions*, is often the sole scientific [wissenschaftliche] means of knowledge for [understanding? reconstructing?] the historical [geschichtliche] processes. The history of religion [Religionsgeschichte] of Hinduism in its different branches—history of myths, of cult, of religious ethics and laws, of piety—but also the history of philosophy [Philosophiegeschichte] in some of its branches can no longer be carried out scientifically [wissenschaftlich] without the use of this method. . . . At the outset, I had posed the question: how does one extrapolate the historical one-after-the-other [geschichtlichen Nacheinander] from out of the seeming one-alongside-the-other [Nebeneinander] of the compiled texts? The part of the answer that I have given so far can be briefly summarized thus: at first, one contemplates the transmitted works not as a whole, but rather dissects them in pieces that are coherent in terms of their content [inhaltliche Zusammenhängende Stücke] and looks for pieces that correspond partially, whether literally or in terms of their content, either in other works or in other contexts of the [same] text; one compares these and then develops the procedure of comparison each time individually from the realities [Gegebenheiten] of the text. This is the *method of comparing multiple transmissions*.” Paul Hacker, “Zur Methode der geschichtlichen Erforschung der anonymen Sanskritliteratur des Hinduismus. Vortrag gehalten auf dem XV. Deutschen Orientalistentag Göttingen 1961,” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 111, no.2 (1961): 489.

37. The attempt by Ernst Steinkellner, a student of the Nazi Erich Frauwallner, to rehabilitate his master’s work appears to us to be paradigmatic of this tendency. “To what extent has his [i.e., Frauwallner’s] ‘Aryan approach’ influenced his world-famous two volume albeit incomplete overview of Indian philosophy so much that one cannot deny its value as a scientific conception [wissenschaftlichen Konzeption] drawn from source texts of the development of philosophical thought in India? . . . How can one today engage Frauwallner’s scientific work [Wissen] in light of this knowledge [of his Nazi involvement]? . . . We are essentially confronted with two types of products of Frauwallner’s scientific activity [wissenschaftlicher Leistung]. On the one hand, with the editions, translations, analyses, interpretations, and hypotheses. . . . It is these products of his work that . . . have become indispensable for any further work and against which any further progress in understanding . . . must be measured. They must be seen as the knowledge gained through Frauwallner’s

responsibility which Levinas finds is already implicit in the very being of language and which he links to the imperative to respond to the other. The historical-critical method is to be critiqued because more is at stake here than just the justification of a method. When truth is traded in for mere empirical correspondence, when ideas are traded in for an assemblage of facts, when minimalism is applauded in the face of global problems, when dialogue is suppressed for the sake of a monologue of methodological control, the historical method must be critiqued. This critique is even more urgent and necessary than we have made the case for here. In his book *Human Understanding*, Stephen Toulmin argues that there are two ways in which one can think of a science: "we can think of it as a discipline, comprising a communal tradition of procedures and techniques for dealing with theoretical or practical problems; or we can think of it as a profession, comprising the organized set of institutions, roles, and men whose task it is to apply or improve those procedures and techniques."³⁸ In the case of Indology, the institutional and hegemonic aspects have so dominated the disciplinary aspects that we can no longer ask the most elementary questions of science: for whom and for what good? Since this science no longer has a positive motivation such as the reappropriation of tradition or the upholding of ethical values, its effects are negative and nugatory. In Carne-Ross's memorable words, "if the humanities failed to humanize us," it is "because we deprived them of their humanity by alternately aestheticizing them and handing them over to scholarship."³⁹ In this sense, German Indology is truly worthy of the epithet "the nay science."

philological-critical studies, which has a certain permanence and on which one can further build. On the other hand, we are confronted with this complex of Frauwallner's ideas about periodization [of Indian history], which is scientifically untenable [wissenschaftlich unhaltbar] because of its racist foundations. These ideas about periodization, however, . . . are not only largely unusable, but can also be clearly distinguished from his genuine philosophical-historical work, which is based on sources, and hence can be easily separated from his work. . . . Just as the natural sciences cannot do without the knowledge they have acquired and build on this [knowledge] without taking into consideration the individual character or the fate of the person who acquired this knowledge, so also, it holds for the knowledge acquired in the human sciences: whatever demonstrates itself as usable, what one can extend, what one can improve, one cannot relinquish in further research. However, this is precisely the case with regard to Frauwallner's achievements, on which we can and must build today, if we do not want to regress. When we remove the ideologically conditioned ideas of periodization of Indian thought and Indian culture from his work, and this means what is actually and in essence 'only' his historical writing, what remains is an impressive work of great clarity and consistency." Ernst Steinkellner, "Vorbemerkungen zu Jakob Stuchlik, *Der arische Ansatz. Erich Frauwallner und der Nationalsozialismus*," 1–2, 3, 4; ikga.oeaw.ac.at/Mat/steinkellner_vorwort_stuchlik_2009.pdf.

38. Toulmin, *Human Understanding*, 142.

39. D. S. Carne-Ross, "Scenario for a New Year," *Arion* 8, no.2 (1969): 202.

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